

Friends Don't Lie by Piper Elizabeth

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Summary: Mike goes to visit Eleven at Hopper's cabin, but it's empty. She's gone. Now, 15 years later, Mike runs into a familiar stranger, but she has no memory of him. What happened to Eleven? Will they reconnect? Mike/Eleven Mileven

1. Chapter 1

Title: Friends Don't Lie

Rating: Strong T – Mostly the usual stuff you'd see on Stranger Things

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Spoilers: All episodes of Stranger Things

Chapter 1

Friday, February 8, 1985

Mike trudged through the woods, his eyes peeled for the small cabin that had once belonged to Chief Hopper's grandfather. Mike had made the trek a few times in the months that since he learned that Eleven was alive and living with Hopper, but the cabin was so far back into the woods that Mike was always afraid he'd miss it and somehow get lost. He knew Hopper didn't like when he arrived at the cabin unannounced, but Mike was too excited to wait until he had time to talk to Hopper and to get him to agree to let him see El. Besides, Hopper was at work. Eleven would be at home all alone. Mike didn't see the harm in visiting her.

Finally seeing the cabin ahead of him, Mike broke into a jog. As he ran, he dodged tree roots and rocks and fallen leaves that were still slick with the rain they had had the night before. With a large envelope tucked under his arm, Mike sped up the rickety old steps to the front door. Mike brought his hand up to the door, ready to knock his secret knock so that Eleven would know it was him. That's when he noticed the door wasn't closed all the way.

"Eleven?" Mike called out.

Hearing nothing, Mike pushed the creaky door open with the palm of his hand. He stepped inside. Mike looked around, shocked. The TV was gone. The couch was covered with a dingy, gray sheet. There were no dirty dishes in the sink or shoes by the door or Eleven's jacket hanging up on the coat rack next to the refrigerator. The cabin looked uninhabited.

"El?" Mike yelled, this time more panic in his voice.

He ran to Eleven's bedroom. He had only been in there once before. He and Eleven had sat on the bed, talking about the things that had happened when Eleven had gone to see her sister. Mike was happy to learn that Eleven had made the decision to return to Hawkins to save them all, rather than choosing to stay with her sister. After Eleven had told him that story, Mike had invited Eleven to the Snowball Dance. She had smiled and said 'yes.' Mike had taken her hand and they sat beside each other, hands entwined. Mike had turned to Eleven and she turned her face towards him. He thought about kissing her then, but Hopper had come in. He eyed Mike suspiciously, as if for the first time seeing him as a teenage boy rather than the kid who had found and helped Eleven. Hopper informed them that they needed to spend their time on the couch in the living room, rather than alone in Eleven's bedroom. Eleven didn't really understand why, but Mike did. Hopper didn't trust him.

Even though that had only been a few weeks ago, it felt like a lifetime as Mike stared out at the empty cabin. He couldn't keep his mind from thinking of the worst case scenario. Did someone find out about Eleven? Was she kidnapped? Was she taken to some other awful laboratory where she would be tested and forced to do things that she didn't want to do? Where was Hopper? Did he run away with Eleven? What had happened? Where were they? Why hadn't she said goodbye? Mike couldn't calm his thoughts.

Mike's eyes flitted around the room, hoping he'd see something – anything that would tell him what had happened. That's when Mike saw the corner of a white piece of paper on the floor of Eleven's room. It was mostly tucked under the bed. Mike bent down and picked it up. He unfolded it. It was a color drawing of Mike and

Eleven. In the picture, Eleven was wearing a blue knee-length dress with a red belt around her waist just like the one she had worn in real life. Mike was wearing a tie and a suit jacket. They were standing close to each other, his hands at her waist and her hands on his shoulders. They were dancing and smiling. The word Snowball was above them. The picture brought a tear to his eye. Mike turned the paper over. On the back was the word 'sorry' written in black crayon. The paper was for him. It was the only thing left in the house and Eleven had left it for him. Finding the picture put his mind a little at ease. He doubted that if Eleven had been kidnapped she would have time to leave him a note about the Snowball. But it didn't make him feel better overall. Eleven was gone.

Mike took one last look around and saw nothing else. He folded the drawing he had found under Eleven's bed and put it in his jacket pocket. He opened the envelope he had tucked under his arm. He took out large photograph. It was the picture he and Eleven had taken at the dance. He was visiting Eleven to give her a copy of the picture. Mike placed the photograph in the middle of the bed. If she came back, she would know he was there. That's all Mike could hope for.

15 Years Later

Monday, May 15, 2000

Zippering his lightweight coat, Mike stepped outside of the large office building he worked in and looked up. The skyscraper that housed dozens of different businesses, including Thompson's, the company that Mike worked for, normally blocked the sun, but today there was no sun to speak of. The sky was a dark grey. The ominous clouds looked like they were ready to start spilling rain at any moment. It wasn't the perfect day to be outside. But Mike didn't care. He needed to take a walk. He needed to get out of that stuffy, ridiculously tall building for even just a few minutes. He felt like if he didn't, he might suffocate right there at his desk. And it was only Monday.

Mike headed down the sidewalk away from the building, walking aimlessly. He pulled the hood of his jacket over the messy tangle of black hair on his head and wondered where he might go. Maybe he

would stop at the deli down the street to get a sandwich even though he wasn't really hungry. Or maybe he would walk to the park nearby and just stop and stare at a flower or two. He had heard on the radio that the tulips were particularly pretty this season. Not that Mike cared much for tulips, but it sounded nice. Or maybe he would skip the deli and the tulips and would just walk.

With his hands in his pockets, Mike did just that. He walked. When he came to an intersection, he turned away from the deli and away from street that led to the park. He continued on his journey down a street he had only been on once or twice before. Despite the fact that he had worked in that very same building for years, Mike hadn't really explored the area. On most days, he barely had time to grab a sandwich for lunch, no matter just to take a walk to see what was around. Work kept him busy, which usually Mike enjoyed. But for some reason, he was not enjoying it that day.

The street Mike was walking down was empty of pedestrians, probably because everyone else was taking shelter from the impending rain. But Mike could hear a voice in the distance. A female voice. He saw a woman up ahead in a black skirt and yellow rain jacket complete with dingy, white sneakers. Her outfit made him laugh. She looked exactly like one of those career women who wanted to look nice, but who were practical enough to not wear high heels. Although her back was to him, Mike could see that the woman had a cell phone to her ear. Definitely a career woman. Mike was about to simply walk past her when he heard a bit of her conversation.

"No!" She shouted into the phone. "That is not ok. You cannot place that child back in his home. Are you listening to me? Mike! Mike!"

Just a few steps ahead of her now, Mike stopped dead in his tracks. The way the stranger said 'Mike' was very familiar. He turned and stared at her, now able to see a little bit of her face for the first time. At first the woman didn't seem to notice him as she was listening to whomever she was on the phone with. But eventually she looked up, giving Mike a perplexed look.

"Hold on," she said into the phone. She lowered it, putting her hand over the phone so that the person on the other end couldn't hear her.

She stared straight at Mike. "Can I help you?"

Mike removed the hood from his head and he got a good look at her face. He recognized her dark brown eyes, her nose, her lips, everything. She looked older, but she was still the same.

"El?" He squeaked out, surprised he could even make a sound.

"I'm sorry?"

His eyes were wide. His brain was in shock. Her voice. He had memorized the sound of her voice. And it was the same.

"It's you. It's really you."

"I don't know you," the woman said, stepping back away from him.

As she said that, it began to rain. A sudden downpour. The rain was loud, the droplets causing instant puddles in the street. The woman didn't seem to mind the fact that they were getting soaked just standing there with nothing to cover them. What she did mind, however, was how close Mike was getting to her. And Mike could sense it. But he couldn't help himself. He took a small step closer.

"El, it's me. Mike."

"I think you have me confused with someone else. I'm sorry, I'm very busy." She went to put the phone back up to her ear, but whoever was on the other end had clearly hung up. "Damn it," she whispered. She shoved the phone into her pocket.

"No," Mike stated. "I don't have you confused with anyone else. I'd know you anywhere. It's been...fifteen years, but..."

The woman raised her eyebrow. "Fifteen years, huh? You definitely have me confused with someone else."

She turned to walk away.

"Tattoo," Mike sputtered. His brain was working a mile a minute. He couldn't let her walk away. He had to figure out some way to get her to stay with him. To keep her talking to him. "You have a tattoo of

the number eleven on the inside of your left wrist. How would I know that if I didn't know you?"

The woman stopped despite her better judgement to keep going. She turned and looked at him strangely. She pulled the sleeve of her yellow rain jacket up and revealed her left wrist to him. There was no tattoo. Instead, she had a small scar where Mike knew that tattoo had once been.

"No tattoo," she said.

"You must have had it removed," Mike said quietly as if saying it to himself rather than to her.

"Sir, I've already told you, you have me mistaken with someone else. Now if you don't leave me alone, I'm going to call the police."

She pulled the hood of her yellow rain jacket over her head although Mike wasn't sure why. She was already thoroughly soaked. As was he.

"I know it's you," Mike continued, not ready to give up. "Your name is Eleven, you..."

"Eleven? You think my name is Eleven? Like the number? The same number you think I had tattooed on my wrist?"

"We were friends," Mike explained. "I found you out in the woods in the rain and I brought you to my house. You...you have powers. You can do things with your mind!" Mike was practically shouting now. He couldn't understand why she didn't remember him. Why she was denying who she was.

"I think you need some help," she said. "Is there anyone I can call for you?"

"I'm not crazy!" He shouted. "It's you!"

"Well, if you're not crazy, then you're just lying," the woman said, turning to walk away from him. "And I'm done with this conversation."

"Friends don't lie!" Mike called after her.

The woman stopped dead in her tracks. For a moment, she just stood there, the rain splattering off her raincoat. Her dirty white sneakers had turned a dirty grey. She turned around slowly.

"What did you say?"

"I said friends don't lie," Mike repeated.

The woman's face was pale. She looked like she had seen a ghost.

"How did you...how did you know to say that?"

Mike walked towards her slowly. He didn't want to scare her.

"Because I taught you that," he told her. "I taught you what a friend is."

"I don't..." she sputtered.

"You remember that, don't you? You remember me saying that to you."

The woman turned her leg at an awkward angle and glanced down towards her feet. Mike wasn't sure what she was doing, but he followed her gaze. He hadn't noticed before that on her ankle was a tattoo. It was small. Mike leaned down to get a closer look. On her right ankle were the words 'Friends Don't Lie.'

"It's...it's just a coincidence," the woman said, trying to convince herself. "That must be from a movie or a book or..."

"I made it up," Mike said. "I made it up and I told you because you didn't know what a friend was. You didn't know what a lot of things were."

"That doesn't...that doesn't make sense."

"What do you remember from when you were twelve?"

"I...I...this is crazy," she answered, ignoring his actual question.

"What do you remember from when you were twelve?" He repeated, his insistence growing.

"I was in a car accident. I don't have any memories from before I was thirteen."

Mike sighed. It all made sense. Why she didn't remember him. Why she didn't remember herself.

"That's what they want you to think."

"They? What are you talking about? Who's they?"

"The government or whoever erased your memory," Mike answered.

"This is insane. I don't know you. You're just some...guy on the street. You probably saw my tattoo and read it before I said anything about it. You're just some creep who..."

"That's not true. Eleven, it's me. You have to remember me. You have to..."

The woman's cell phone rang. She pulled it out of her pocket and looked at the caller ID.

"I have to take this. It's important. I have to go."

"This can't be goodbye," Mike said. "I've found you after all this time..."

"I'm not who you think I am," she stated.

"Please. I can't lose you," he pleaded. He had tears in his eyes. One tear fell, mixing with the rain that stuck to his skin.

The woman sighed and stared down at her ringing phone.

"There's a coffee shop on 9th and Walnut. It's called Ricco's," the woman said, the words rushing out. "Meet me there at six."

"Ok."

"Just tell me you're not some axe murderer," she said.

"I'm not an axe murderer."

"Six o'clock," she said, her phone still ringing.

The woman flipped her phone open and put it to her ear. She gave Mike one last look and walked down the sidewalk, her sneakers sloshing in the puddles. Mike watched her until she disappeared around a corner. He leaned back against the building, his heart racing. As the rain poured down, his wet hair dripping into his eyes, his clothes clinging to him, Mike took a deep breath. He had gone fifteen years without seeing her. Fifteen years of wondering what had happened to her. Fifteen years of wondering if she was still alive. Fifteen years of not knowing if she ever thought of him. And fifteen years of wondering *what if she had stayed?* At six o'clock, he hoped he would get his answers.

Author's Note: Ok, so there's the first chapter of what I'm hoping will be at least a 10 chapter story. I've been working on this idea for a long time and have finally had time to start to plan it all out and put it down "on paper." I really hope you enjoyed this and that you are intrigued enough to keep reading. Don't forget to comment (I really appreciate positive reviews and constructive criticism) and I hope you'll stay with me on this journey!

2. Chapter 2

Chapter 2

Monday, May 15, 2000

At exactly 5:45, Mike sat down in a little corner booth at Rocco's Cafe on the corner of 9th and Walnut. He took off his damp coat and hung it on the back of his chair. It was still raining, although the rain had slowed to a drizzle.

Mike had left work early, before he had finished all of the projects at his desk. Mike never did that. Although he technically only worked until five, Mike never left until everything was done. It was why his boss loved him. Well, for that reason and others. But Mike didn't want to think about work. He wanted to think about Eleven.

Was it possible that they had been living in the same city, 2,000 miles away from where they had first met? San Francisco was a big place, but Mike wondered if they had ever crossed paths before. Had he walked by her on the street and didn't recognize her? If she hadn't said the name 'Mike' into her cell phone, would Mike have even stopped to talk to her?

Mike thought about his first day in San Francisco. After graduating from college with a degree in computer programming, Mike had received a job offer from Thompson's Computers. At that time it was a small start-up company in San Francisco led by Jeff Thompson, a visionary in the computer programming field. Mike had moved out to the west coast, saying good-bye to his best friends Lucas, Dustin, and Will. The truth was, even though he would miss them, he wanted to get out of Hawkins. It held too many memories of Eleven.

Mike's first few weeks in San Francisco were a blur of a new job, new people, and city streets he wasn't used to. He paid way too much for a crappy apartment that was way too small and always seemed to smell like feet while he tried to find his place in the new landscape. After a few years, the small start-up company he worked for grew and grew until it was a multi-million dollar company. Mike had stuck with them the entire time, but sometimes he missed that smallness of

the company he had started with. Sometimes he wished he could go back to the one room office, rather than standing in elevators with people he didn't know and working in a glass office with furniture that probably cost more than his parent's house. It was amazing how quickly time flew. And yet, every minute without Eleven felt like an eternity.

Looking at his watch, Mike began tapping his foot nervously. It was 5:58. Any minute she could walk through the doors. He didn't know what he was going to say. If she truly had no memory of him and her time in Hawkins, how would he ever convince her of who she was? And what if he was wrong? What if she wasn't Eleven, but just some woman who sounded like her and looked like her? But who else would have "Friends Don't Lie" tattooed on her body?

Another ten minutes went by. Mike couldn't help but stare at the door to the small cafe. Every time it opened, he almost jumped out of his seat. But every time it wasn't her. His heart felt like it was beating out of his chest. Mike couldn't remember the last time he had been that nervous and excited all at the same time. Yes he could. It was the Snowball in eighth grade. The minute Mike saw Eleven walk into the gym when they were twelve years old, he felt that rush of nervous, excited energy. She was the only one he had ever known who could do that to him.

Five more minutes passed. Was she just running late or was she not coming? Mike tried to put himself in her shoes. What would he do if some stranger came up to him on the street and told him he was someone he couldn't remember? Would he listen or tell that person to go to hell? What if she really wasn't coming? What if Mike really never did see her again?

The door to the cafe opened and Mike glanced over. It was her. Standing there in her black skirt, white sneakers, yellow rain coat, and tattered leather satchel across her body she scanned the cafe, looking for him. Mike waved to her and she made her way over to them. He stood up as she approached.

"Hi," he said.

"Hi."

"I was...I was afraid you weren't going to show up."

"I wasn't going to," she admitted, taking off her coat and putting it on the back of her chair. "After meeting you, I went back to my office and convinced myself not to come."

"What made you change your mind?" He asked, thankful that she had changed her mind.

She shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe it's because I've always liked a good mystery or because...I felt bad knowing you'd be waiting here. I figured I at least owed it to you to show up."

"I appreciate that," he said. "Can I get you coffee or tea or anything?"

"No thank you." There was a long pause. Neither of them knew what to do or how to begin. "So..."

"So..." he mimicked. He couldn't help but stare at her. She was a beautiful woman, anyone with eyes could see that. But Mike could tell she didn't care much about her appearance. Her hair was its natural brunette color, her face was makeup free. She wore no jewelry, including no wedding ring, which Mike was glad to see.

"I'm Jane," she finally said, reaching her hand across the table to shake his hand.

"Jane?" He questioned, the name sounding foreign coming from his lips even though he knew Jane was the name Eleven had been given at birth by her real mother. She nodded. "It's going to be...weird to call you that."

"That's my name," she stated, leaving no room for argument. Mike had to bite his tongue to keep from calling her El or Eleven. But he couldn't scare her away. If he was too persistent about her past, she might run from him. He had to tread lightly. And if that meant calling her Jane - so be it.

"I'm Mike," he said. "Mike Wheeler."

"What do you do Mike Wheeler?" She asked as if they were on a first date just getting to know each other.

"I'm a computer programmer," he answered. "Or I was. I mean, I still am, but these days I mostly oversee other computer programmers. I work for Thompson's."

She raised an eyebrow. "Thompson's? As in the company that sold their product to Microsoft for millions of dollars a couple of years ago?"

"Yeah. That would be it. I was lucky enough to start with the company when it was small. I guess you could say I've grown with it."

"Impressive," she said.

"I guess. What do you do?"

"I work for the state in the Human Services Agency," she answered. "I'm a social worker. I help kids in the foster care system or kids without a home."

"That's noble work."

She shrugged. "It's not easy, but someone has to stand up for these kids."

"It doesn't surprise me," he said. "That you'd end up doing that kind of work. After all, you were basically an orphan yourself."

"An orphan? I was an orphan?" She asked. "In San Francisco?"

"No. In Hawkins, Indiana. That's where we met."

"Do you want to start from the beginning, Mike?" She suggested. "How you think you know me? Who you think I am?"

"Yeah, I can do that," he said, settling back in his chair. He thought about how to begin. "It was...ah...1983. November. One of my best friends, Will, went missing one night."

"Missing?"

"He was riding his bike home from my house, but he never made it home. Nobody knew what happened. They found his bike in the woods. My friends and I all went out looking for him one night. We weren't supposed to, but...you know, we were kids. Anyway, it was pouring and freezing, but we were determined. That's when we met

you."

"In the woods?"

"Yes."

"I was just out there? Alone?"

Mike nodded. "It was the craziest thing. You were just standing there in this over-sized yellow T-Shirt. No jacket, no pants even. Your head was shaved."

"I had no hair?" She questioned skeptically. "Did I say what I was doing out there?"

"You didn't really talk at first so we brought you back to my house."

"You didn't think to call the police?"

Mike shrugged. "We were kids. We were more afraid we'd get in trouble with our parents for being out in the woods at all. Anyway, I got you dry clothes and let you sleep in my basement. You told me your name was Eleven. You had a small number eleven tattooed on your wrist. In the same place you have that scar."

Jane covered her left wrist with her right. Although it was only a small scar, she suddenly felt ashamed of it.

"Why would a kid have a tattoo?" Jane asked.

"I didn't know it then, but you were part of a government experiment at Hawkins Laboratory."

"A government experiment?" She mocked. Mike could tell that she wasn't believing him. It did sound extremely far-fetched.

"I'm not crazy," he said. "I mean, I know it sounds crazy and I probably wouldn't believe me either if someone was telling me this stuff, but it's true. All of it. We found out that you knew Will."

"Your lost friend?"

"Yes. You were able to communicate with him. He was stuck somewhere that we called the Upside Down."

"The Upside Down? What is that?"

"It's hard to explain. It's like...an alternative universe."

"This is getting a little ridiculous," she stated.

"I know it sounds that way, but...Hawkins Lab was doing these experiments. As part of those experiments, you opened a gate to something we called The Upside Down. And Will was taken by a monster called the demogorgon."

"The demo...what?" Jane asked.

"Demogorgon. But Will's mom was able to communicate with him using lights," Mike explained, talking faster. "And you, you used a radio to talk to him. You have powers. You can see things in your mind."

"Like a mind reader?"

"Not exactly. It's like, you can see people in your mind, but I don't think you can actually read their mind. And you can make things happen. Like...you flipped a van once."

"A van?"

"Yeah. We were riding our bikes trying to get away from the bad guys and the van was coming at us, probably going to kill us. But you flipped it right over our heads."

"With my mind?" She continued, her voice showing him that she didn't believe him.

"Yes. You were helping us find Will. We knew he was alive. We just had to get to him. In the end, Will's mom and Hopper..."

"Hopper?"

"Yeah, the chief of police. They found Will in the Upside Down. And

we...you, me, and my friends fought the Demogorgon. Well, actually it was more you. You managed to kill it, but you were sucked into the Upside Down. I didn't know if you were still alive. It was almost a year later when I found out Hopper had been keeping you, isolated from everyone. By then, we learned the Upside Down had spread and there were these things we called Demodogs running around and..."

"Stop," Jane said, putting up her hand. Mike stopped. He knew he had explained too much. The story was unbelievable. Even Mike knew that.

"I know that this is hard to believe," Mike said quietly.

"It's not just hard to believe. It's impossible to believe. This is all a very good story. Maybe you should be a science fiction writer, but..."

"I'm not making it up," Mike insisted. "Ask Hopper. He'll tell you."

"Hopper? The chief of police? In Hawkins, Indiana?" Skepticism dripped from her voice and she wasn't holding back.

"He was the chief of police," Mike corrected. "I'm assuming...he must be the man you think is your father or something. He must have taken you away and erased your memory. Unless the government took you."

"The government didn't take me," she insisted. "I've lived with my father my whole life."

"So you did live with Hopper."

"I don't know what you're talking about," she snapped. "My father's name was Ray and our last name isn't Hopper."

"He probably changed his name," Mike said. "To protect you both. Jim Hopper always wore a hat and...and really liked coffee. Does that sound like your dad?"

"That sounds like every middle-aged man."

"Look, your dad has to be him," Mike insisted. "He wouldn't take you away and leave Hawkins just to give you to somebody else. He'd

want to protect you."

"This is getting to be a little too much."

"Do you have a picture of him?" Mike continued. "Of your dad?"

Jane sighed. She contemplated whether or not she wanted to go down that particular rabbit hole. She questioned whether or not she should have shown up in the first place. Who was the man sitting across from her? What did he want from her? On the other hand, he was compelling. Jane felt drawn to him. And hadn't she always questioned what the first thirteen years of her life were like? Hadn't she wondered why she never got her memory back? More than that, she remembered the reoccurring dream that she always had. In the dream she was sitting with a brown haired boy, eating Eggo waffles, and laughing. Jane never knew what it meant. Could the man named Mike sitting across from her be that boy? Or was it just a dream?

Jane reached down into her satchel that she had placed on the floor. She took out her wallet and pulled out a picture on a small card. She put it on the table and slid it in front of Mike. It was a photograph of her father. Mike recognized him instantly. He was a little older, but he could still see the younger man that Mike knew so well.

"That's him," Mike said, studying the picture. "That's Hopper."

"You could say that about any picture of any man," Jane retorted.

"Ask him. Just ask him about your past. Or better yet, take me to him. He'll remember me. He'll have to admit everything."

Jane flipped the picture over. On the back of the card were the words 'In Memoriam. Raymond Smith. 1942 to 1996.' Mike stared at the obituary card. He couldn't believe it. Hopper or Ray or whatever his name was, was dead. He locked eyes with Jane.

"I'm sorry," he said although it didn't seem like the words were enough. "I'm so sorry."

"Thank you," she replied, taking the picture and placing it back in her wallet.

"How did he die?"

"He was shot."

Mike was taken aback. He expected her to say that it was some disease or maybe even a car accident. Mike wasn't expecting him to have been murdered.

"How? By whom? Was he still in the police force?"

"My father wasn't a police officer. He was a private investigator. He was tracking a man who was worth millions who was cheating on his wife. The woman was going to divorce him and take all his money. So the man hired a hitman and had my father killed. It happened one beautiful, sunny Sunday afternoon. My father was coming to visit me in my apartment. He did it every Sunday. The hitman shot my father in the hallway of my apartment building. I watched it happen. My father died in my arms."

"I'm so sorry, Jane," Mike said, reaching across the table to take her hand. But she moved it away. "Did the hitman get caught?"

Jane nodded. "He and the millionaire who orchestrated it both went to prison."

"And you've been all alone ever since?"

She shrugged. "It's easier to be alone." Jane stood up, ready to end the conversation. She hated thinking about the day her father died. Instead, she chose to focus on how he had lived.

"You're leaving?" Mike asked.

"Look, I know you...miss this person...this girl called Eleven and I'm sorry. But I'm not her. If she even existed at all. Your story is awfully far-fetched."

"I know it sounds crazy, but it's not."

"And I'm just supposed to believe that?"

"There must be something I can do to..." Mike said, feeling frantic. "I

mean, how do you explain your tattoo? Friends don't lie?"

"I got that tattoo out of rebellion when I was seventeen. I just picked the first thing that came to mind."

"But it must have come from somewhere. It came from me."

"I'm sorry. I have to go," Jane said, putting on her coat. She slung her satchel over her head and left arm so that it draped across her body.

"Wait," Mike said, digging through his briefcase. He pulled out a small card and a pen. He scribbled something on the back and then held it out to her. "Take this. It's my business card. That's my cell phone number on the back. You can call me any time. Day or night."

"I..."

"Please, just take it. You don't...you don't have to use it, but at least you'll have it."

"Fine," she said, taking the card. She slid it into the front pocket of her satchel. "It was nice to meet you."

"It was nice to see you again," he said, catching her eye. Jane hesitated for a moment and Mike thought she might be changing her mind about leaving. But then she turned and walked away.

Author's Note: Thank you so much for the overwhelming positive response for the first chapter. I wasn't sure how this story would be received because it's so...different. This chapter was a little tough because I wanted to include a lot of detail and back story. I hope it didn't disappoint. There's lots more to come so stay tuned!

3. Chapter 3

Chapter 3

By the time Mike made it back to his apartment, he was soaked again. He had decided to walk home from the cafe, which was about two miles away from where he lived. It had started really raining about a mile into it. But Mike didn't care. He didn't care that his expensive shoes were getting soaked or that he was dripping in the elevator of his fancy apartment building. When the elevator doors opened, Mike reached into his pocket for his keys. He opened the door and walked into the dark space. He flipped the lights on as he peeled off his wet jacket and kicked off his soggy shoes. They landed against the cream colored hallway wall with a thud. In his moist socks, Mike went over to the refrigerator and grabbed a beer. He popped the top off, took a long swig, and leaned against his counter, staring out at his open concept apartment.

His apartment was nice, one hundred times nicer than the one he had first lived in when he moved to San Francisco. He had expensive furniture and granite countertops and a big screen TV. Sometimes Mike missed his old apartment. He missed the squeaky mattress and the ratty, second-hand couch. He missed the noisy neighbor he shared a wall with who would practice his violin at all hours of the day and night. He even missed tripping over boxes because he couldn't afford a storage unit and he had no other place to leave them in his apartment except in the living room.

That's when Mike remembered. The boxes. The ones he had moved to San Francisco with years before. The ones he never really unpacked because his old life never seemed to match his new life. Mike put his beer down on the counter and raced to the spare bedroom. He opened the door, realizing he hadn't stepped foot in that bedroom in months. He looked around at the boxes piled up beside the bed that no one had ever used. There had to be about a dozen boxes. Mike wished in that moment that he had done what his mom suggested he do when he first moved out of Hawkins - label them. Unfortunately, he hadn't listened. So Mike dove right into the first box, not knowing what he would find.

Reaching in through the sea of foam packing peanuts, Mike finally felt something solid. He pulled it out, the peanuts going everywhere, and found himself holding a white ceramic dinner plate. He reached in again and grabbed a matching bowl. Mike realized his mom must have packed dishes for him, afraid that he wouldn't have any "adult" plates to eat off of. They would have come in handy when Mike moved into his first apartment if he had known that they were in the box. He spent three months eating off paper plates. He took that box off the top and started with the one underneath it. It was full of comic books. Placing that one aside, he went for the next one.

Six boxes later, Mike found the one he was looking for. Memories of his childhood. He pushed aside certificates from the Honors Society, a plaque from the AV club, and photographs of his family and friends. He picked up a picture from Halloween of Lucas, Dustin, Will, and himself dressed as Ghostbusters. Mike took a moment to look at it, remembering the day they had all showed up to school in costume when no one else had. But that wasn't what he was looking for. Mike set the picture aside on the spare bed and looked back in the box. On the bottom of the box was a plain, white, unmarked, large envelope. Mike picked it up slowly. He slid his finger under the lip and undid the seal. With shaking hands, he took the contents of the envelope out. There were two identical photographs inside. Mike stared at them. Why hadn't he thought of them in the cafe? Why hadn't he told her about them? They were proof of what he was telling her. Proof that they were kids together. Proof that she wasn't Jane, but was Eleven. Mike sat on the floor, leaning against the bed for support. He held onto the photographs, unable to take his eyes off of them. A tear rolled down his cheek. He just had to hope he would see her again.

Four Days Later

Mike sat at his desk, staring at his computer. The blinking cursor was taunting him. He hadn't typed any lines of code in well over fifteen minutes. He knew the new program he was working on was due by the end of the next week, but Mike had no desire to work on it. Besides, he had ten programmers who worked for him. He knew he could just delegate the responsibility to one of them, but Mike needed the distraction. He needed to keep himself busy. Otherwise,

his mind kept going back to Eleven or Jane or whoever she was now. She hadn't called. Mike wished he had done more than just give her his business card. What if she never called? Mike knew he could track her down if he wanted to. He knew she worked for the state and assuming that she took Hopper's fake last name, he knew her first and last name. Mike was a computer guy. He could hack into a system or make a few phone calls and find the information he needed. But Mike was afraid to cross that line. If he tracked her down, she might hate him and turn away from him forever. He was afraid to risk it. So he waited for her to make the first move.

Staring at his computer screen, Mike typed in a few letters and symbols. He immediately erased them. The code wasn't right. It wasn't even code. It was gibberish. Mike couldn't concentrate. He stood up, thinking that some fresh air might do him good. It was a beautiful spring day. The fog had lifted and the sun was out and there wasn't a rain cloud in sight. As Mike went to turn his monitor off, the very woman he was trying so hard not to think about walked into his office.

"Hi," Jane said. She was dressed in Jeans and a short-sleeved v-neck red top. Her hair was in a ponytail. She still had on the same white sneakers and the satchel across her torso. She looked casual. She looked beautiful.

"Hi," Mike said, stepping towards her. "What are you...how did you..."

"There was no one at the reception desk, so I kind of wandered around until I found the office with your name on the door. It's amazing what you can get away with when you act like you belong. You...ah...you have your own office?"

"Yeah, well, I've been with the company since we started in a large warehouse and we had to take out our own trash. Once you've been here for that long, they give you an office."

Jane looked around, taking in his expensive office furniture and the lack of anything personal in the room. There wasn't even a photograph on his desk.

"Nice view," she said, looking out the large windows. From the

nineteenth floor, Mike had a grand view of the city below. Far out in the distance you could see the bay and even the Golden Gate Bridge.

"I'm surprised to see you," he said, ignoring her comment. The only view he cared about was her. "But I'm glad you're here."

"You're probably wondering what I'm doing here," she said, turning to face him.

"As long as I get to see you, I don't care what you're doing here."

"I found something," she continued. "Or I guess it's what I didn't find that sent me here."

"What are you talking about?"

"I..."

Before she could say anything else, another person burst into Mike's office. She was tall, blonde, and beautiful. In her short, black dress she looked more ready for a cocktail party than an office building.

"Mike!" She shrieked, running over to him in her black high-heels. Jane watched the scene unfold in front of her. Mike was surprised, but clearly knew the woman. The mystery woman threw her arms around Mike's neck and kissed him full on the mouth. He reciprocated. Jane looked away, concentrating on her own dirty sneakers. She felt awkward being there.

"What are you doing here?" Mike asked once he and the mystery blonde had parted. Her red lipstick had transferred to his lips. "I thought you weren't coming home until this weekend."

"We left Milan early," she explained, her arms still around his neck. "My father had to come back for some meetings. Besides, I missed you."

"I...I missed you, too," Mike replied although the words seemed forced.

Jane cleared her throat, trying to get Mike to remember that she was still in the room.

"Oh. Hello," the woman said, turning to look at Jane for the first time. "And who are you?"

"I'm Jane," Jane said, reaching her hand out. The woman looked her up and down, but did not extend her hand for a handshake. Jane let her hand drop limply to her side.

"Jane and I..." Mike began, stuttering. "I'm helping Jane with a computer issue. You know how I contract out sometimes."

"You know my father doesn't like you doing that on company time," Margaret said in a scolding tone.

"I know," Mike said, catching Jane's eye. She looked away from him. "This was a one time thing."

"I'm Margaret," the woman said. "Margaret Thompson."

"As in Thompson's Computers," Jane commented, putting the puzzle together in her head.

"That's me!" Margaret exclaimed with a large smile, revealing perfectly straight, perfectly white teeth. "My father owns the place. And Michael is one of his best employees and one of the best boyfriends, isn't that right sweetheart?"

"Uh...yeah," Mike agreed reluctantly.

"Well, thank you for your help with that...computer problem," Jane said, playing along with Mike's story. "I should go. Goodbye."

Jane didn't even look at Mike before she left his office briskly. She knew she had no right to be, but she was angry. Why hadn't Mike just told his girlfriend the truth? Why had he lied about who Jane was? Whatever his reason, Jane decided he wasn't worth it.

In his office, Mike watched Jane walk away and his heart sank. He took Margaret's hands off his shoulders. Mike quickly grabbed the white envelope out of his briefcase that he had put in there the night he had found it just in case he happened to see her again.

"Michael?" Margaret questioned, wondering what he was doing.

"I have to give this to her. I'll be right back."

Mike jogged out of his office. He caught up with Jane as she stood, waiting for the elevator.

"Wait," he said.

"Look, I shouldn't have come here." Jane said. "I..."

"I have proof," he interrupted. "Proof that you and I knew each other when we were kids."

"What kind of proof?"

"I should have thought of it the other day at the cafe, but I forgot that I even had these. It wasn't until I..."

"What proof?" She repeated.

"Here," Mike said, handing her the white envelope. Jane opened it, taking out the photograph inside. She studied it carefully. She saw her own, young face staring back at her. She was in a blue dress with a red belt. Her hair was short, her makeup done in typical 80's fashion. She was standing next to a younger version of Mike. And he was definitely the same boy from the reoccurring dreams she had had about the Eggos. She met Mike's eyes.

"What is this?"

"Our picture from the Snowball," Mike answered.

"Snowball?"

"A stupid dance we had in middle school. We went together."

"I..." she stuttered, not knowing what to say.

"It's proof," he told her.

"You could have...made this up. You're a computer guy. You could have photoshopped it or..."

"And where would I have gotten a picture of you to do that?" He

countered. "That is you...isn't it?"

"Yes, but..."

"Besides, didn't you say you found something?"

She nodded, but didn't speak. She just kept staring at the photograph as if she didn't believe it.

"Can you meet at the library later?" She finally asked, meeting his eyes.

"The library?" He questioned.

"Seven o'clock? That is if you can get away from your girlfriend."

"I'll be there," he assured her.

"There's an area in the back. It's...secluded. By the periodicals. Meet me there."

Jane put the photograph back in the envelope. She handed it out to Mike.

"No. You keep it. I have another copy. That one was supposed to be for you anyway. On the day I went to give it to you, I discovered you disappeared. I left it for you...in the cabin where you lived with Hopper hoping that one day you'd come back and find it. I went back to get it on the day I left for San Francisco years later. It was still there."

Mike felt a sadness wash over him and he knew Jane could sense it. She was staring at him as if she felt his pain with him. When the elevator doors opened, it was almost as if it broke the spell between them.

"I'll see you later," Jane said, looking away from him and stepping inside the elevator. Mike had half a mind to go with her, but he didn't. He watched as the doors closed. When he turned around, he saw Margaret standing in the doorway of his office, smiling at him. Mike manage to smile back, telling himself that he only had a few more hours until he would get to see Eleven again. That alone, made him smile for real.

Author's Note: I know everyone is angry with me for killing off Hopper in the last chapter, but it was something that had to be done to keep the story moving. Thank you for all of the great reviews and thank you for reading!

4. Chapter 4

Chapter 4

At 6:30 on the dot, Mike shut down his computer. He grabbed his jacket from the back of his office chair and hurriedly put it on. The library was only a few miles away, but Mike knew that traffic always played a part in anywhere you went in San Francisco. He couldn't be late. The last thing he wanted was for Eleven to think he wasn't going to show up.

"Jane," Mike said out loud to himself. He had to remember to call her Jane.

"What was that?" A man's voice boomed.

Mike looked up to the doorway of his office. Jeff Thompson, the founder and CEO of Thompson's computers, as well as the father of Mike's girlfriend, was standing just inside his office with his hands in the pockets of his very expensive, tailored suit.

"Nothing," Mike replied. "Just talking to myself. How was Milan?"

"You know Milan. Beautiful architecture, great food, and Margaret loves to shop there."

"Of course she does," Mike said with a smile. He found it amusing that Jeff assumed Mike knew what he was talking about. Mike had never been to Milan or Paris or Tokyo or any of the other places Jeff would travel to on the company jet with Margaret by his side. Jeff was always telling him about the amazing places he had gone as if Mike knew what he was talking about. Mike had the financial means to travel, but not the time. He was always working. And although Margaret had assured him she could get him the time off if she just asked her father, the idea of traveling with Margaret was not something Mike wanted to do.

"I think I might have found us some more partners, too," Jeff continued.

"More partners?"

"The tech world is expanding, Michael. We have to expand with it. And the Italians are ready to jump onboard the tech market."

"Of course," Mike replied. He glanced at his watch. It was 6:34.

"Do you have somewhere to be, Mike?"

"Yes. I'm meeting a...friend."

"You're not spending your evening with Margaret?" Jeff questioned.

"Unfortunately, sir, I had these plans before I knew you and Margaret would be coming home early," Mike fibbed.

"Of course. You know, I haven't seen the latest codes on that program you're working on," Jeff said.

"I...ah...I had Bobby and Chris working on them today," Mike told him. It wasn't a lie. He hadn't been able to concentrate on his work before Jane walked into his office. He definitely couldn't concentrate after she left so he had passed the coding assignment onto some of the other employees.

"Well, of course they're not due until next week," Jeff continued. "I just know you like to get a jumpstart on things."

"I do. And they'll get done on time. You have my word."

"Of course. Well, don't let me keep you. Have a good evening."

"Thank you, sir."

"Michael, how many times do I have to tell you to stop calling me sir? After all, we're practically family."

Mike managed a weak smile as Jeff walked out of the room. As soon as he was gone, Mike wiped the smile off of his face. He liked Jeff. He was a good guy. He was smart and ambitious and had been a good mentor to Mike when Mike was just starting out. But ever since Mike had been dating Jeff's daughter, their relationship had changed and Mike wished it could go back to the way it had been before.

Pushing Jeff and Margaret and the company from his mind, Mike grabbed his briefcase and headed out of the building. He was practically skipping at the thought of seeing Eleven again as he hailed a cab.

About twenty minutes later, Mike entered the library, heading straight for the back. He hadn't been to a library in years. As matter of fact, he had only really used the library once since moving to San Francisco and that was just to complete a project on the history of computer science for some investors. Mike found the periodicals section and looked for Eleven. He found her sitting at a microfiche machine, her eyes completely focused on the screen in front of her. Mike took a moment to watch her before announcing his presence.

"Hi," he said.

"Hi," she replied without looking back at him.

"You know, there is something called the Internet," he finally said jokingly.

"I've heard of it," she retorted with a lightness in her voice. She was joking with him, too.

"I didn't even know the library still used microfiche."

"The Internet doesn't have copies of the Hawkins Herald from the 1980's."

"But they have copies of it here in San Francisco?" He asked, surprised.

"The librarian helped me get these from a library in Indiana. They just came in this morning."

"That was fast," Mike commented.

"I paid to put a rush on it."

"Why? Why are you looking up the news from Hawkins?"

"Just verifying your story," she answered. "I've been doing some

research since we met in the café earlier this week."

"You won't find much information in the newspaper. I told you, most of what happened in Hawkins was top secret. It's not like the news of the Demogorgon ever made the front page."

"Just sit," she instructed. Mike didn't need to be told twice. He sat in a wooden chair beside her. Near them was a wooden table that Jane's satchel was resting on top of. There were file folders, printouts from newspaper, internet articles, and the photograph from the Snowball on top. She had clearly been busy.

"You really have been doing your research," Mike commented.

The screen in front of Jane swirled with articles and photographs, all rushing past them. Mike was afraid he might get seasick. With a button that almost looked like a joystick, Jane slowed the screen. She scanned the headlines.

"Your girlfriend wasn't mad that you were leaving her tonight?" Jane asked, not meeting his eyes. "After she just came back from Milan and all."

"I told her I had to work on something."

"She doesn't look like the kind of woman who takes 'no' for an answer."

"She's not that bad," he said.

"I never said she was."

"You said it with your tone of voice."

"It's none of my business," Jane said. She stopped the joystick and pointed to the screen. "There."

Mike looked at the screen. In front of him was a newspaper article about Will's disappearance. It was from the first day he was missing.

"That's Will," Mike said, looking at a black and white photograph of his friend as a child. Will's bowl haircut almost made Mike laugh. He

would have to tease Will about it next time he saw him.

"His disappearance makes the newspaper for a few days, but then they never really mention him again," Jane explained. "That seems strange."

"I told you, it was kept very hush hush."

"Then...there's this."

Jane scrolled a little more. She focused in on another small photograph with a caption underneath. Mike read it out loud.

"Chief Jim Hopper reports the Hawkins police department is following all leads, but have no suspects at this time," he read. "Hopper told the reporters that even when he realized there was some kind of government conspiracy going on. I remember my parents reading the papers and saying..."

Mike trailed off as Jane pointed to the screen, her finger landing not on the article, but on the photograph of Hopper.

"That's not what I'm getting at," she told him.

"I don't understand," Mike said.

"That's my father," she whispered. Mike could hear a sadness in her voice. "You weren't lying when you said he was the chief of police in Hawkins." She sighed. "How could I not know that he had a whole other life?"

"He did it to protect you," Mike said. "He would do anything to protect you. He even kept you from me for almost a whole year."

Jane continued to stare at the black and white picture on the screen. Mike decided it was time to change the subject.

"You said in my office that there was something you didn't find. What did you mean?"

Jane stood up and led him over to the table she had taken over. Mike joined her. They sat side by side, their legs almost touching. Jane grabbed a stack of newspapers from the corner of the table and

brought them in front of them.

"These are copies of the San Francisco Times from December of 1984 to January of 1985. I've gone through every single one."

"What were you looking for?"

"I woke up on January 21, 1985 in a hospital. My father...Hopper...whatever his name is told me that I had been in a car accident. The only scar I had was this one on my wrist." She flashed her wrist at him. The same wrist that had once had the number 11 tattooed on it. "But I couldn't remember anything from before that day. The doctors said that I had hit my head and had amnesia. And I just accepted it. I didn't have a bump on my head or a bruise or a cut. Nothing. No serious injuries. But yet somehow I supposedly had amnesia. I never thought to ask for more information."

"You were a scared kid. Of course you'd believe the doctors and your father."

"But look," she said, shuffling through the newspapers. "There's nothing about the accident I was in. Not one newspaper article. Not one mention in the police reports. I even went to the police station yesterday and requested all of their files from January. I went through every police report. There was nothing about my accident. Why is that?"

Mike wasn't sure what she wanted him to say. The truth was staring her in the face, but he knew it was difficult to accept.

"I don't..." he began.

"The only possible explanation is that there never was a car accident," she continued. "It was all a lie. My father. The accident. The amnesia. I just...I don't understand how this is all...real. I don't know what to think or what to believe or..."

"Hey, hey, it's ok," Mike said, putting his hand on her arm, trying to comfort her. "We're going to figure this out. Together."

"Together? I barely know you. Less than a week ago, you were a total

stranger."

Mike took the picture from the Snowball and showed it to her.

"I'm not a stranger," Mike told her. "I'm a friend. And friends don't lie, remember?"

She smiled weakly.

"Tell me more," she prompted.

"More about what?"

"Tell me more about the Upside Down."

"You won't think I'm crazy?"

"I might," she replied. "But tell me anyway."

Mike had spent a long time forgetting the Upside Down, but he knew if he was going to win her back, he had to remember.

"It's...like our world, but...different. Things would look like they'd look in the real world, but it was darker and spookier and...disorienting. People didn't always survive the Upside Down. My sister's friend, Barb, was killed there. And Will...after being there in the Upside Down, Will was never really the same. I mean, he's ok now, but there are times when I know he's thinking about it. When he spaces out or has nightmares. It's always with him."

"And you said I opened it? The gate to this place? To the Upside Down?"

"You didn't mean to. It was part of the experiments they were doing on you at Hawkins Lab. They'd make you do things. They'd make you spy on people or hurt people. You were almost like a weapon to them."

"Why me?"

"Your mother was part of these government experiments. As a result, you were born with powers."

"What happened to my mother?" She asked.

"They took you from her when you were born. They told her you had died. And she...ah...she went a little crazy."

"So I never really had a mother?"

Mike shook his head. "You were raised in the lab."

"You said at the cafe that...I had...powers? That I could communicate with Will when he was in the Upside Down?"

"Yes. And don't forget you flipped a van."

"Look, I'm not saying that I believe all this, but...but I feel like I have to ask. What else could I do? What other powers did I have?" She asked in a hushed whisper.

"I watched you break a kid's arm once. And you made a kid pee his pants."

"What?"

Mike smiled. "They were bullies. You were just getting back at them."

"Those don't sound like very good powers."

"Did I mention that you flipped a van?"

Jane laughed a nervous laugh. "I can't believe that we're even having this conversation. I mean, it's...crazy. All of this is crazy. There's no such thing as super powers. And even if there were, I certainly don't have powers."

"Can you honestly say that nothing strange has ever happened to you that you can't explain? That you've never made anything happen?"

"Of course not."

Mike sighed. He looked at her face. She was hiding something.

"Friends don't lie," he said.

There was a long pause. "There was this one thing," she said quietly.

"What happened?"

"I was eighteen. It was my first year of college. It was late. I was walking back to my dorm after studying in the library all night. This guy started following me. At first I thought it was nothing, but...then I got the creeps. So I started hurrying and then he started running. He...he grabbed me and knocked me down. He was trying to pin me to the ground and..."

"And..." Mike prompted.

"And the next thing I knew, he was flying through the air and he landed a good ten feet away. I didn't understand how it happened. All I knew is I scrambled to my feet and I got away."

"You did that. You saved yourself."

"But I don't know how I did it. I don't even know if I believe in all of this."

"Look at the evidence," Mike said. "There's no information about your accident because it never happened. There's this photo of me and you when we were kids. The man you think was your father was the chief of police in Hawkins and never told you about it. His photo is in the newspaper. What more evidence do you need?"

"You say it so simply, but this is my life. This is admitting that my entire childhood was a lie."

"You don't remember your childhood!" Mike exclaimed.

"But this is changing everything I know about myself. And you're talking about monsters and super powers and...and things that don't exist. I mean, how do you completely erase someone's memory? That's not...possible."

"Yeah, well I never thought super powers and monsters from the underworld were possible either, but I've seen them with my own eyes. Maybe Hopper found someone in the government to erase your memory. There was this doctor from the lab...Doctor Owens. I know

he was trying to help Will and that he helped Hopper. Maybe he did it. Maybe he erased your memory."

"This is all...too much."

"We might not have all the pieces yet, but we are going to figure this out," he assured her.

"How?"

"Well, maybe we should start with whether or not you still have powers," Mike suggested.

"I can't...do anything special."

"You said that you made a guy fly through the air."

"But I...I don't know how. I don't even know if I did that."

"People just don't go flying through the air on their own."

"How are we going to figure out if I can still do things when I don't know how?" She asked, feeling frustrated. "And that's if I even believe in all of this."

"I'll talk you through it. But we can't do it here."

"Then where?"

"My apartment is only a few blocks away."

She raised an eyebrow. "You want me to go with you to your apartment?"

"Look, I'm not a murderer or a rapist or any other horrible thing that you're thinking in your head."

"I don't think you saying that makes me feel any more comfortable."

"I know you don't remember, but once you trusted me to keep your secret. You trusted me to take care of you. I'd never hurt you. I promise. And friends don't lie, remember?"

Jane looked into his eyes. She took a deep breath.

"Please don't make me regret this."

"I won't."

"And I have mace in my bag. Just warning you."

Mike chuckled. "Good to know. Come on."

Together, they gathered all the materials from the table and put them in Jane's bag. They walked out of the library. As Mike led them down the street, Jane snuck a glance over at him. She could see the same eyes as the boy in the picture from the dance. The same eyes as the boy from her dreams. Everything her father had ever taught her about being careful around strangers, especially men, were screaming in the back of her mind. But somehow she trusted Mike. Somehow she knew she needed him. And somehow she knew it wasn't the first time he had helped her.

Author's Note: Ok so...I really wanted to showcase how difficult this is for "Jane" to just accept seeing as how her whole life is basically being turned upside down (no pun intended). With that being said, I've been struggling over whether to refer to her as Eleven or Jane so mostly I've just been sticking with Jane. Also, just a note about chapter length – I strive to keep every chapter between 2,000 and 3,000 words. However, when it comes down to it, I base chapter length on what part of the story needs to be told and I don't worry so much about the word count. Therefore, some chapters are longer and some are shorter and that's just the way it turns out. Thanks for reading!

5. Chapter 5

Chapter 5

Jane and Mike were standing in Mike's living room. There was a single coke can in the middle of his glass coffee table. Mike stood at one end of the table while Jane was on the other side, concentrating on the can.

"Imagine it being crushed," Mike instructed. "Picture it in your mind."

"I'm trying," she replied.

"You have to focus."

"I am!" She snapped.

"Just concentrate on what you're doing. Let everything else go."

She took her eyes off the can and stared at him.

"And how am I supposed to do that when you keep barking orders at me?" She retorted.

"I'm sorry," Mike said. "I'm trying to help."

Jane sighed, feeling defeated. "I know. I'm sorry. But I can't do it."

"Let's...try something else," Mike suggested.

"I don't have powers," Jane said, trying to control her anger.

"You do. You just don't...remember how to use them."

"We've already tried me opening a shut door and me moving objects without touching them. I can't do any of it!"

"I know it's frustrating, but..."

"This is a waste of time!" She exclaimed. "We've been doing this for hours. I can't do things with my mind. Nobody can!"

"You can do it. I know you can. You made that guy fly through the air in college."

"Maybe," she said. "Maybe I imagined it. Maybe he just got spooked and...and ran away."

"You didn't imagine it," Mike told her. "You did it because you had to protect yourself."

"Even if I did do something to him, and I'm not saying that I did, I don't know how I did it."

"What if...what if we put something in a room that you really want? Maybe if you're motivated to open the door, you'd be able to do. The last time I saw you unlock a lock with your mind, everyone you cared about was about to be attacked by a demodog. You saved us."

Jane shook her head, feeling defeated. "I can't," she whispered.

Mike could see her eyes filling with tears. He didn't want to push her. And he certainly didn't want to make her cry.

"Alright. Let's take a break."

"Ok."

"Do you want anything to drink? I might even have chips and dip or something."

"Just water would be great."

"One water coming up."

Mike went into the kitchen and grabbed two bottles of water from the refrigerator. When he went back into the living room, Jane was sitting on the floor, hugging her knees, her back leaning against the couch. Mike settled down across from her, sitting on the floor against his love seat. He handed her one of the water bottles. She opened it and took a long drink.

"I'm sorry," she said.

"You don't have to be sorry."

"I'm trying. I really am, but I just...I can't."

"You can. I know you can."

She shook her head. "Maybe I should just go."

"Tell me about yourself," Mike said. The last thing he wanted to happen was for her to leave. He would do anything to get her to stay.

"What?" She replied, surprised by the change in conversation.

"I don't really know anything about your adult life. What was your life like? Where'd you go to college? Do you have a boyfriend?"

She raised an eyebrow at the last question.

"I don't know if this is a good idea. Maybe I should just..."

"Come on, we're friends, right?"

"Are we...friends?" She asked.

"We were."

"According to you," she replied.

"We were friends," he said again with more conviction. "I want to be friends again. I want to get to know you. So...tell me about yourself."

She took a deep breath. "Ok." There was a pause as she tried to think about what she was going to say. "My life was good even though I can't remember the first thirteen years of. But my father loved me and took care of me. We had a good life together."

"And it was always just the two of you?"

She nodded. "I always asked my dad why he didn't try to meet someone, but he always told me that I was enough."

"Did you ever ask him about your mom?"

"He would just say that she died when I was a baby. Never any details. And whenever I pressed him on the issue, he would get...sad. So after a while I stopped asking."

"Keep going," Mike prompted. "Tell me more."

"I went to the University of California for college. It was far enough from home to have a little independence, but close enough for me to visit my dad on the weekends. I didn't care much for the social part of school, but it got me the degree I needed and I went to work right away for the state of California."

"And as for my last question," Mike said.

"What question is that?"

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

She rolled her eyes. "Not that it matters, but no. I don't have a boyfriend. Men...ah...men usually find me strange."

"Strange? Why?"

"I don't know. I mean, sometimes there are things that I feel like I should know...things I should have learned as a kid, but with the memory loss, I..." She paused. "I think the best answer to that question would be that I'm socially awkward. I always have been. I didn't have that many friends in high school or college. And as for men...it's been my experience that men are much more interested with sleeping with me than actually wanting any kind of relationship with me."

"I'm sorry," Mike said.

Jane shrugged. "I do pretty well on my own. My work as a social worker is my top priority. I want to help as many kids as I can. I want to make sure they get into good families so that no child feels alone. There are thousands of kids in foster care in California, hundreds in San Francisco alone. Some will spend their whole life in the system, being bounced from one place to the next. These children deserve better lives."

"That's amazing. And it doesn't surprise me," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"The fact that you help kids. I mean, considering what your childhood was like...it makes sense."

"I didn't have a good childhood, did I?"

Mike shook his head. "The people at Hawkins lab weren't exactly...loving towards you. I think Hopper was the first adult you met who actually cared about you, which was weird to see because Hopper never seemed to care much for anybody."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean after he divorced his wife and his..." Mike trailed off. He forgot how little Jane knew about her childhood and about the lives of the people who surrounded her. The man she knew as her father was a complete mystery to her.

"He was married?" Jane questioned, very intrigued. "And what...what were you going to say?"

"Forget it."

"No!" She shouted angrily. "You can't do that. You can't pick and choose what you want me to know about my past. If you want to be my friend, if you want me to trust me, you have to be honest with me. I've had too many people in my life lie to me."

Mike sighed. "Hopper had a daughter before you. His...biological daughter. She died of cancer when she was little. I think it really... ah...messed him up, you know."

A tear rolled down Jane's cheek. "That's horrible," she said after a long pause.

"I think you taught him how to love again."

She wiped her tears away. "What about you?" She asked.

"What about me?"

"What's your story? You know so much about me and I know nothing about you."

"I had a good childhood," Mike told her. "I have an older sister Nancy. You liked her. I think you two would have been friends if..."

"If my father hadn't taken me away?"

Mike nodded. "I have a younger sister, too. Holly. She's in college now. Sometimes I feel like I don't really know her well. She was still young when I left home."

"Where'd you go to school?"

"I went to the University of Indiana with my best friends."

"With Will?" Jane asked.

"Yeah. And Dustin and Lucas. You knew them. We were all friends. We made a pact to stick together. After everything we had been through together, we all just needed some normalcy in our lives. So we spent four years of school in a tiny apartment with crappy furniture, eating takeout practically every night. We got on each other's nerves and annoyed each other and...and we loved every minute of it."

Jane smiled. "I've never had friends like that."

"You did. You just don't remember."

They let Mike's statement hang in the air for a minute.

"What did you do after college?" Jane finally asked.

"I got a job offer from Thompson's. I almost didn't take it. Moving away from Hawkins was a big deal, but I had to. I had to start a new life somewhere."

"And what did your friends think about that? About you moving away?"

"I think after college we all realized we needed a new start. They were pretty bummed, but they were happy for me. And hell, we all

thought I'd be back within a year."

"Why?"

"Because Thompson's was a tiny company at the time. There was only me and one other programmer and of course Mr. Thompson at the helm. It was a chance, but I had to get out of Indiana. So I packed up and moved to California and then the company grew and...here we are."

"And Margaret?" Jane asked. "How long have you been together?"

"Ah...a little over a year. We've known each other since I started at the company, but it wasn't until a little while ago that we started dating."

"Let me guess. She started paying attention to when you got your own office with your name on a door."

"What does that have to do with it?" Mike asked, feeling defensive.

"Just that I know women like her. Women that only like someone because they think it will increase their social standing. I mean, she seems a little high maintenance."

"You don't even know her."

"You're right. I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said anything. Should we...ah...get back to testing my powers that don't exist?"

Mike's telephone rang. He got up off the floor and walked over to the phone in the kitchen. When he saw who it was on the caller ID, he glanced over at Jane.

"I'll be right back," he said.

Mike went into his bedroom, closing the door behind him. The phone stopped ringing a few seconds later. Jane guessed he had picked up the phone in his room. She knew it must be Margaret. Who else would he not want to talk to in front of her? Even though she had only met her briefly, Jane did not like Margaret and she couldn't see a guy like Mike liking her either. Then again, Jane barely knew Mike. Sure, he was kind and helpful and nice, but she knew very little

about him. Maybe he was just as materialistic as his girlfriend appeared to be. Jane told herself that no matter what she thought of Margaret, it was none of her business. Once Jane found out everything she could about her mysterious childhood, she and Mike didn't need to be friends.

With Mike still on the phone, Jane got to her feet. She began looking around Mike's apartment. There was a framed picture on the side table near the couch. Jane picked it up and stared at the faces. It was a photograph of two older adults, a man and a woman. Jane guessed they were Mike's parents. She walked slowly over to Mike's bedroom door. She could hear him talking.

"I'm sorry," he was saying. "I didn't expect you to come home early. I already had plans to do some work."

He was definitely talking to Margaret and apparently she was not happy with Mike. Jane stared at the door. She tried to think of everything Mike had told her. She concentrated on wanting the door open. She visualized the knob turning. She focused on something she wanted in that room. Her eyes narrowed, her body went rigid. Suddenly the knob slowly began to turn. The door sprang open, creaking on its hinges. Jane expected to see Mike standing there, but he wasn't. He was sitting on the edge of the bed with the cordless phone in his hand. He stared at Jane. Her eyes grew wide and they locked on his.

"I gotta go," Mike said into the phone. He hung it up without waiting for a response.

Jane didn't move. Had she done that? Had she opened the door with her mind like Mike said she could?

"I..." she stuttered, not knowing what to say or if she could even form words.

"You did it!" Mike exclaimed, jumping off the bed. He ran over to her and hugged her. She wrapped her arms around him, hugging him back.

"I...I don't know how I...I couldn't have...I..." Jane stammered, unsure

of what had just happened.

Mike stepped back so he could see her face.

"You opened the door. With your mind. I knew you could do it!"

"I'm...tired," she said.

"Yeah, that happens. You'd get tired after expending so much energy. Also..."

Mike grabbed a tissue from a box next to the couch and handed it to her. Jane looked at him curiously.

"What's this for?"

"I forgot to mention that you usually get a bloody nose."

Jane put the tissue up to her nose. When she pulled it away, the tissue had blood on it.

"Why?"

"I don't know. It just happens. But it's ok. You did it."

"That means you've been telling the truth. Everything is...true."

"I told you friends don't lie."

She smiled. They locked eyes and for a moment Jane thought he might kiss her. She realized she would kiss him back.

"I should go," she said, breaking the connection between them.

"Why? We're just getting started."

"It's after eleven."

"Right. I didn't realize how late it was. We should...try this again. See if you can do anything else."

"Ok," she said.

"Tomorrow? It's Saturday. Maybe we can...meet for lunch."

"Lunch?"

"Yeah. Why not? We're friends, right. Friends do lunch."

Jane contemplated what he was saying. She did enjoy spending time with him.

"You sure Margaret won't mind?"

"Don't worry about her."

"Do you like ice cream?" She asked.

Mike nodded. "Sure. Who doesn't?"

"Alright. Meet me tomorrow at two at 900 North Point Street."

"What's at 900 North Point Street?"

"Meet me there tomorrow and find out," she said.

"Ok. It's a..." Mike cut himself off. He almost said 'it's a date.' But of course it couldn't be a date because he had a girlfriend. A girlfriend who, despite having been in Milan for almost two weeks, Mike didn't care to see.

"I'll see you tomorrow," Jane said, saving Mike from his comment.

Mike handed Jane her satchel. She slung it over her shoulder and headed for the door. Mike opened it for her.

"Bye," he said.

She smiled at him. "Bye."

Mike closed the door behind her. He leaned against the door, smiling because he knew he would see her again soon.

Author's Note: Thank you, thank you, thank you for the amazing reviews. Knowing that people are excited to read this story makes me excited to write it. I know I said this story would be about 10

chapters, but it's looking more like it'll be between 15-20 chapters long. I hope that's ok! Thanks for reading!

6. Chapter 6

Chapter 6

The Next Day

Mike briskly walked from the corner where the taxi had let him off. He stopped and stared up at the brick building that was 900 North Point St. A large sign above his head on top of the building said Ghirardelli. Mike knew that the building in front of him was the first Ghirardelli chocolate factory. It was one of those places in San Francisco that all the tourists flocked too, but Mike had never been. He was always too busy at work to think about going out for ice cream. And Margaret would never eat something so fattening.

"Hi," a familiar voice said from behind Mike.

Mike turned around. Jane was standing behind him. Her hair was down. It was shoulder-length, framing her beautiful face. She was wearing a short sleeve, knee-length dress printed with red and pink flowers. She had a small red purse hanging from her wrist. Her usual pair of slightly dirty, sensible white sneakers were on her feet. They made Mike smile.

"You look...great," he complimented before he had time to think about what he was saying. He sounded like they were on a first date, which they most definitely couldn't be. But that didn't mean he didn't want them to be.

"You're early," she said, ignoring his remark. She had put a lot of thought into what she was going to wear even though she knew she shouldn't. She should have just shown up in Jeans and a T-Shirt, but it was a beautiful day and she wanted to look nice.

"I don't like to be late," he replied.

"Twelve five three," Jane said, looking at the time on her cell phone.

"You remember?" Mike asked.

"Remember? Remember what?"

"When we first met you didn't really understand time. I gave you my watch and told you to meet me at three one five since I knew you didn't understand what three fifteen meant."

"I've always wondered why I say time that way," Jane said. "It's one of those things that always annoyed men. One of the things that always made me...strange."

"You're not strange," Mike said.

Jane turned to look at the building. "My father used to take me here," she said. "Every Sunday. He said even though it's for tourists, Ghirardelli makes the best hot fudge in California."

"Every week? That's a lot of ice cream," he said.

"It's a good thing then that I don't own a car and walk everywhere."

"I've never been here," Mike told her.

"Never?"

"Too touristy. Plus I work a lot."

"This is only a few blocks from your office building. I'm surprised your work buddies don't frequent here for lunch."

"Ice cream for lunch?" Mike asked with a laugh.

"Don't knock it until you try it," Jane replied.

Mike smiled. "Maybe the guys do come here. I don't know, I don't hang out with them much outside of work."

"You've been with the company for years and don't have a friend there?"

Mike thought about that for a moment. He certainly had colleagues he was friendly with and those he wasn't. He had occasional fancy dinners with Margaret and her father, Jeff. Mike had even gone out a few times to a bar with some of the guys from his department, but Mike certainly wouldn't call them friends.

"I guess when you say it like that, it's kind of sad," Mike finally said.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you feel bad. I'm just...surprised. That's all. You seem like the kind of guy who would make friends easily."

"I think after everything I've been through it was easier just to stick with the friends I already had than trying to let anybody else in."

"I get that," Jane said. "I don't really have many friends either. I guess Sheila is really my only friend."

"Who is Sheila?" Mike asked.

"A woman I work with. She's about twice my age, but she trained me when I first got hired and has really been like a mentor to me. We go out every once in a while to dinner or something. I think she feels bad for me because she thinks I'm lonely."

"Are you? Lonely?"

Jane looked at him. "I used to think I wasn't."

"And now?"

"I'm not so sure." They stood, staring into each other's eyes for a few moments. Eventually a rowdy group of tourists in all yellow shirts walked by, breaking whatever spell had fallen over them. "Should we go in?"

Mike nodded. Jane walked towards the building. Mike hurried ahead to open the door for her. She thanked him and they walked in together. The building was crowded so Jane and Mike got in line. He studied the menu, written out on chalkboards above the checkout counter. They had dozens of different kinds of ice creams as well as delicious toppings. Jane didn't have to look at the menu. She knew exactly what she wanted.

"So, what are you having?" Mike asked.

"A triple chocolate brownie sundae."

"That sounds like heaven."

"Do you want to share?"

Mike nodded. "Sure."

They waited until it was their turn. Jane ordered the triple chocolate brownie sundae. She reached into her purse for her wallet, but Mike held out a twenty dollar bill to the cashier before she had the chance.

"Thank you," Jane said.

"You're welcome."

They moved on to the "pick-up" counter and waited for their triple chocolate brownie sundae. When it arrived, Mike looked at it impressively. It was a large, tall bowl full of ice cream, hot fudge, whipped cream and it had two cherries on top. Jane grabbed two plastic spoons from a dispenser and led Mike over to a table for two in the corner. She set the ice cream down in the middle of the table and they both sat. She handed him one of the spoons.

"Dig in," she said.

Mike put his spoon into the ice cream, managing to pick up a large spoonful of chocolate goodness. He brought it to his lips. Jane watched him.

"Oh my goodness," he said. "That is one of the best things I have ever tasted."

"Now you know why I came every Sunday," she said, digging in. "I... ah...I haven't come as much since my dad died."

"It must be hard," Mike said. "To be here without him."

She shrugged. "He wouldn't want me to give up the best ice cream in town just because I miss him."

They ate in silence for a few minutes. Jane couldn't help but notice that Mike was watching her, not creepily but admiringly. She took a big spoonful of ice cream. The hot fudge began to drip off her spoon

before she could bring it to her mouth. Jane wiped her mouth and chin with a napkin.

"Oh you...ah...still have some there," Mike pointed out.

Jane wiped a clean napkin across her face, hoping she got all of the remnants off.

"Did I get it?"

"No. It's right..." Mike began. He took a napkin and leaned over the table. He wiped the paper gently across Jane's chin. His fingertip brushed her cheek. "There."

She felt her cheeks flush. "Thank you," she whispered.

"You're welcome."

"I...I didn't tell you this before, but I think I've dreamed about you," she told him.

"Dreamed about me? What kind of dream?"

"It's this reoccurring dream of us as kids. We're eating Eggo waffles." Mike laughed out loud. Jane looked at him quizzically. "Why is that funny?"

"It's funny because you really liked Eggos," Mike explained. "It was the first food I gave you when I found you. After that all you wanted was Eggos. How long have you had this dream?"

She shrugged. "It started not long after my...accident. Sometimes I would have the dream a few nights in a row or I'd go months and not have it. But it was always there. It would always come back to me. Always the same. The last time I had the dream was a few days before I met you on the street."

"Did you ever ask your dad about it?"

"I think I mentioned it once, but he said it was just a dream. I assumed it was just one of those weird things. I mean, dreams are unexplainable, right?"

"Sometimes. Or sometimes they're memories we don't remember."

"They were always so real," Jane continued. "So much more...life-like than any dream I've ever had. I should have pushed my father to tell me more about my childhood."

"You didn't know that the dreams were memories," Mike said. "You can't blame yourself for not looking for answers."

Jane sighed. "Why don't you tell me something about yourself."

"About me?"

"Something that Eleven would know."

Mike noticed that she hadn't said 'something that I would know. She still wasn't one hundred percent convinced that she was Eleven. Mike thought for a moment, trying to think of something good.

"You were my first kiss," he finally said.

"Really?" Jane replied.

Mike nodded. "Yup. It was right before you fought the Demogorgon. We were in the school cafeteria. I invited you to the Snowball dance. I was trying to...explain it to you. How you don't go to the Snowball with a friend. That you go with someone you like. And to prove my point, I kissed you."

"And what did I do? Or say?"

"We sorta got interrupted after that."

"I wish I remembered it."

"Me too," Mike said.

"I..." Jane was cut off when her phone rang. She dug into her small purse to find it. She glanced at the caller ID. "I have to take this."

Jane stood up from her seat. She walked outside and held the phone up to her ear. Mike could see her throw the windows. Although her

back was to him, she was motioning her free hand in anger. Mike cleaned up the mostly empty ice cream dish and hurried outside.

"That's great!" Jane yelled sarcastically into the phone. "What happened to the foster family we had lined up?" There was a pause. "Fine! I'll deal with it!" She slammed the flip phone closed and crossed her arms over her chest.

"Is everything alright?" Mike asked

She whirled around to look at him. "No! I'm sorry. I have to go to work."

"It's Saturday," he said. "I thought government employees at least got to take the weekends off."

"A two year old boy's mother died last week. We've been trying to locate family, but until then he was placed in foster care. The only problem is, the foster family is giving him back."

"Why?"

Jane shrugged. "I don't know, but I have to go get that little boy and find him a new placement."

"Well, can we...can we do this again? Meet me for dinner tonight."

Jane shook her head. "I'm sure I'm going to be working on this all weekend. Finding him a new family and the paperwork...it's a lot."

"Monday then? Besides, we need to see if you have any other powers," Mike said, saying the last few words in a very low voice.

"Ok," Jane agreed. "Monday. After work."

"I can cook something if you want to come back to my place."

"Sure," Jane said as her phone rang. "It's the foster mother again. I really have to go."

Jane flipped the phone open without waiting for a response from Mike. She was practically running away. Although Mike didn't want

her to go, he was proud of her loyalty to her work and he was excited that he would see her again soon.

When Mike got off the elevator on his floor of the apartment complex, he was surprised to see the door to his apartment slightly open. He distinctly remembered closing it before he left to meet Jane. After she had dashed off to go to work, Mike had decided to explore downtown San Francisco. Even though he was in the most touristy section of town, he took his time watching the sea lions at the pier and exploring one of the free museums by the water. He had never had the chance to do those things since he was always so busy. It turned out that he liked playing tourist and that he wanted to do it again with Jane by his side. But those thoughts were shattered when he saw his apartment door open. Mike considered calling the police, but what if he was overreacting? What if he hadn't shut the door before he left? What if the maintenance man from the building was finally fixing the squeaky bathroom door that Mike had reported weeks earlier?

Taking a deep breath, Mike pulled his cell phone out of his pocket, ready to dial 911 just in case. He slowly walked to the doorway. He poked his head inside and saw a very familiar looking head of blonde hair sitting on his sofa. Mike immediately went from fear to anger.

"Margaret, what are you doing here?" He asked, storming into his apartment.

She got off the couch and smiled at him with her red lipstick smile. "I missed you," she crooned, greeting him with a smacking kiss on the lips.

"How did you get in here?" He asked.

"You gave me a key, remember?"

"I didn't give you a key," he told her.

"Oh that's right," she said with a sly smile. "I had one made a few months ago."

"You...what?"

"Well, I we've been dating long enough, Michael. Honestly."

"Ok, but that is something we should have talked about," Mike said, seriously irritated. "You can't just barge in here and..."

"Where were you?" She asked.

Mike was about to retort that it was none of her business, but he knew that would just cause an argument.

"Out," he finally answered.

"Out where?"

"Just out. Doing things. Running errands. What are you doing here, Margaret?"

"I've been back for a few days and you haven't even asked to see me."

"You came back early!" He reminded her. "I already had plans and..."

"I'm your girlfriend. I trump your plans," she told him.

He sighed. "Look, I'm sorry. I've just been...busy. That's all."

She put her arms around his neck. "Well, how about to make it up to me, we go out tonight?"

Mike thought about Jane. Even though they didn't have plans until Monday, he would have much preferred to spend the evening with her. But of course he couldn't tell Margaret that.

"Alright," he agreed. "Why don't we...grab some food to go and walk along the pier and enjoy the..."

"Walk along the pier? With the tourists?"

"Yeah, don't you ever just want to explore the city?"

She shook her head as almost in disgust. "No. I want to eat at a five star restaurant as far from tourists as possible."

Mike sighed. "Ok. I'll get reservations at Julian's."

She smiled. "My favorite. Pick me up at seven."

"Ok," he agreed although he wasn't sure why he was agreeing. He hated Julian's. Sure, the food was excellent and the service was top notch, but Mike hated the environment. Julian's was always full of rich, upper-class people who were always complaining about something that wasn't important and who thought if their food was brought out too early or too late or if the tiniest thing was wrong, it was a problem. The restaurant was also owned by Margaret's father's best friend, which meant they could always get a table no matter what.

"Oh, and before I forget," Margaret said, reaching for something on the table next to the couch. "Who is that?"

She showed Mike the photograph of him and Eleven at the Snowball. He had placed it on the side table so he would always have a reminder of Eleven.

"It's just an old picture from junior high," Mike said.

"You didn't answer my question. Who is that?"

"Some girl I went to school with."

"What's her name?"

"El," he answered, wondering why Margaret was suddenly so interested. "Short for Eleanor."

"Funny because that girl looks an awful lot like that woman who was in your office before. What was her name? Jamie? Janice?"

"Do you mean Jane?"

"Yes. Jane. This girl looks an awful lot like Jane."

"Jane is just someone I was doing consulting work for. I told you. And this..." Mike said, taking the photograph from her. "This is from my old life. I found out when I was going through some old boxes."

"Funny how it ended up in your living room."

"I was going to take a picture of it and e-mail it to the guys. Remind them how dorky we were back then."

"Whatever happened to this Eleanor?"

Mike shrugged. "She moved away when we were kids."

"Well, it doesn't belong in your living room," Margaret told him. "Besides, you should have a picture of us up around here. I'll bring one for you to have at dinner." Mike didn't reply. "Well, then I guess I'll see you tonight." She kissed Mike on the cheek. "Don't be late."

As soon as she was gone, Mike put the photograph back on the table and wiped the lipstick off his cheek.

Author's Note: So I know nobody likes Margaret, but every story has to have a villain, right? Also, I just want to give a shout out to the city of San Francisco. Even though I live on the other side of the country, I've been to San Francisco a few times. It is one of my favorite places to visit. If you haven't been there, I recommend it!

7. Chapter 7

Chapter 7

Mike stared at the bottle of wine and two wine glasses he had put out on the kitchen table. Should he offer her wine with dinner? Was that appropriate? Or would she think he was trying to flirt with her? Was he trying to flirt with her? That was a no-brainer. Of course he was trying to flirt with her. But should he be?

The table was set for two with two glowing candlesticks in the middle. The candlesticks had been a gift from Margaret. She had told him once that he needed to be more romantic. Mike didn't want to think of Margaret in that moment so he blew the candles out and hid the sticks in the cupboard next to the refrigerator. The lasagna he had made was baking in the oven. It was the one dish he was able to make well. Other than that, he was a bit hopeless in the kitchen. Mike's eyes settled back on the wine glasses. But with a knock at the door, Mike didn't have any more time to internally debate their presence. He opened the door and smiled when he saw Jane.

"Hi," he said.

"I'm sorry I'm late," she replied, brushing past him into his apartment. "I got stuck in court."

"Court?" Mike asked, closing the door behind her. "Is this a different case than the two year old boy from Saturday?"

"Yes. This is something else entirely. I've been working with a mother who lost her three children last year," Jane explained as she walked into the living room. She dropped her bag on the couch. "She was an alcoholic but she's been clean for eight months. She's done everything the court has asked of her, but the judge still won't give her her children back."

"Why?"

"Because she's African American," Jane said. She took off her jacket and threw it on top of her bag. Next she kicked off her shoes. "Because she's poor. Because that particular judge is racist and classist

and sexist and horrible."

"So what are you going to do?"

"Keep fighting. Make sure she stays on the straight and arrow. And I'm not going to stop until her children are back in her care!" Jane put her hands on her hips. Her face was heated with anger. She sighed. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to come rushing in here and dumping all of my problems on you."

"That's ok," Mike assured her. He liked hearing about her work. She was making a real difference in the lives of so many kids. "You must stay pretty busy."

"There are never enough hours in the day for all the children and families who need help. We're overworked and understaffed and every year things just seem to get worse."

"Can't they hire more people for your department?"

"The government won't give us that kind of money. In the meantime, we all just do the best we can."

"Well, anyone who has you fighting for them is pretty lucky."

Jane managed a weak smile. She stared at her shoes and then at her naked toes.

"I'm sorry. I like to be barefoot. I should have asked if..."

He laughed. "It's fine. I don't mind. Make yourself at home." He paused. "You know, you were barefoot the first time I met you."

"I was?"

He nodded. "I don't know if you even ever wore shoes before I found you."

"At the lab?"

Mike nodded. "You weren't exactly treated well there."

"All this injustice in the world. I wish I could help more kids. I wish I could help every kid."

"You know, we could...use that anger."

"What do you mean?"

"Anger was always a good catalyst for you to use your powers. You were always most powerful when you were angry. And dinner isn't ready yet anyway. Want to try it?"

Jane was about to reply that she couldn't do it, but then she didn't. Why not give it a try? She had opened the door with her mind before hadn't she?

Mike went off to retrieve the empty soda can that he and Jane had used before. He placed it once again in the middle of the coffee table. Jane focused all of her energy on it. She squinted her eyes and imagine it being crushed in her head. She pictured it over and over. She was concentrating so hard, her head started to hurt. Just as she was about to give up, a dent appeared in the can. Jane broke her concentration and looked over at Mike.

"You did it!" He exclaimed, rushing over to pick up the can.

"Well, I didn't exactly crush it," she said, pulling a tissue out of her pocket and wiping the blood from her nose.

"But it's better than what you could do last week."

Jane felt weak and tired.

"I'm not feeling very well," she said.

"Here, sit."

Mike put his hand on her arm and helped her sit down on the couch. He went to grab a bottle of water. He handed it to her. She sipped it slowly and he sat down beside her.

"Did this always happen? Did I always get this weak?"

"You'd get weak if you exerted too much energy. Not usually this weak. Maybe it's because you're out of practice."

She took another sip of water. "I had another dream about us last night," she said.

"About eating waffles?"

"No. No waffles this time. But we were kids. Maybe just a little younger than that picture of us at the Snowball. I was in this sweatshirt and sweatpants that felt so comfortable. So warm. Anyway, in the dream I sat down in one of those old Lazy Boy Recliners. And you showed me how to push it back. Almost like it was a...a ride."

Mike smiled. "That's another memory."

"It is?"

Mike nodded. "That happened the day after I found you in the woods. I pretended to be sick so I stayed home from school. I was showing you all of the things in the house. Things you had never seen before like the TV and my dad's recliner. You're starting to really remember."

"It feels so...strange. To not know what's a memory or just a dream."

"I can't imagine what that must be like," Mike said. "I'm sure Dustin would have some theory about that."

"Your friend Dustin?"

"Yeah, he's usually the one who comes up with the weird theories."

"Have you told him about finding me?" Jane asked. "Or any of your other friends?"

Mike shook his head. "No. Not yet. I think I've selfishly been wanting to keep you to myself."

"I'd like to meet them someday."

"I think they'd be very happy to see you again."

"Do they still live in Hawkins?"

"Dustin and Lucas stayed. Dustin is a science teacher at the high school we all graduated from. And Lucas got married to a girl he met in college and owns a pretty successful bar and restaurant in town."

"And Will?"

"After college Will went to New York to live with his brother, Jonathan. Will's an illustrator. He does picture books and comic books and things. He's really talented. I think out of everyone, he needed to get out of Hawkins the most. Too many bad memories."

"All because of me," Jane said.

"No. You were the good memories."

Jane looked over at him and they locked eyes. Jane could feel her whole body begin to tremble. She and Mike were so close. Just a few inches and...

The timer on the oven went off. Jane practically jumped, the loud beeping sound startling her. Mike, however, didn't move. He just continued to stare at her as if he couldn't hear the noise.

"Shouldn't you get that?" Jane asked.

"Yeah," Mike replied, finally taking his eyes off of her. "Sounds like the lasagna is done."

Mike stood and headed off into the kitchen. Jane stayed on the couch, taking another sip of her water. Her eyes landed on the table set for two. Jane noticed the bottle of wine. As much as a drink to calm her nerves sounded like a good idea, Jane wasn't sure if it really was a good idea. It didn't take much alcohol to make her tipsy and she was afraid of what would happen if she let her guard down. But, then again, she found herself wanting to let her guard down.

"Do you need any help?" Jane called to him.

"Nope. But everything is ready if you want to take a seat."

Jane stood up slowly. She could smell the lasagna and it smelled heavenly. As she stood and made her way over to the table, something shiny caught her eye. Jane looked to her left and noticed something on a bookshelf that she hadn't noticed before. It was an 8x11 photograph in an expensive looking shiny, silver frame. It was a picture of Margaret. She was smiling with her perfect white teeth and her bright red lips. Her blonde hair was perfectly framing her face with not a strand of hair out of place. Her eyes stared out from the photograph as if she was looking into Jane's soul. It brought Jane back to reality. Mike was taken.

"I hope you're hungry because I made a lot of lasagna," Mike said as he came out of the kitchen with the lasagna in his hands. He placed it in the middle of the table on two trivets.

"It smells delicious," Jane complimented.

As Mike brought over a tossed salad with all of the fixings, Jane sat at the table. She tried to ignore the picture that she could see from across the room.

"Do you want some wine?" Mike asked.

"Maybe just a little," Jane replied.

Mike expertly uncorked the wine and poured a generous amount in his glass and then the same amount in Jane's. It was definitely more than 'a little,' but Jane didn't say anything.

"To a chance encounter that brought us together," Mike said, raising his glass as a toast.

"To friendship," Jane said.

They clinked their glasses together and each took a sip.

"Dig in," Mike said.

Jane placed the white napkin Mike had laid out on her lap. She took a large serving of salad and placed it on her plate. Mike had gone all out with cranberries, walnuts, and feta cheese.

"Thank you," she said. "For dinner. It's been a while since I've had a real home cooked meal."

"You don't cook?" Mike asked.

Jane shrugged. "I can make a few things, but most of the time it doesn't seem worth it. Frozen dinners are usually what I have for dinner."

"Well, then I guess you'll have to come over more often," Mike said.

Jane smiled and was about to reply when she caught another glimpse of Margaret's picture. Jane couldn't help but feel like the woman was staring right at her. Jane looked away and focused her attention on her plate.

"I don't cook much either," Mike continued. "Thankfully there's a really good deli just down the street that makes amazing prepared meals. I think I'd starve to death without them."

"Does Margaret cook?" Jane asked, the question slipping out of her mouth before she had a chance to think about what she was asking. She hadn't meant to bring up Margaret.

"No," Mike answered. "Margaret would rather go to a fancy restaurant every night of the week. Did your dad cook for you?"

"We made do," Jane answered. "He certainly wasn't the best cook, but he could make a few things pretty well."

They continued their meal, making small talk and discussing everything from favorite restaurants in San Francisco to a program Mike was working on at his job. When dinner was over, Mike was on his second glass of wine and Jane was just finishing her first. She could already feel her head buzzing just slightly.

"More wine?" Mike asked.

"No thank you," Jane replied.

"Come on, it's not like you're driving," Mike said, remembering that she didn't have a car. He knew she walked or took taxis everywhere.

"I think I've had enough. Anymore and I'll start making a fool of myself."

"A lightweight, huh? Well, when you come back to Hawkins to see the guys again they'll have you drinking all night long so you better build up some stamina," Mike said with a smile.

Jane could see Margaret's photograph again. It's like any time Mike mentioned doing something with Jane in the future, Jane could feel Margaret's presence.

"Look, Mike...I..." Jane began, ready to talk to him about what was going on between them. Were they just friends? Is that all that Mike wanted? Even though Jane wanted more, she wasn't about to cross that line. She would never be 'the other woman.' And besides, Jane was still figuring out who she was. Maybe entering into a relationship wasn't the best idea. The only thing Jane knew for sure was that they had to talk about the unspoken connection between them.

"I want to show you something," Mike interrupted. He stood up before Jane even had a chance to respond. She followed him into his spare bedroom. Mike knelt down in front of the boxes that he still had stacked up in piles. Mike pulled out the box that held his childhood memories. He took out a first place medal from the 9th grade science fair.

"What was your experiment?" Jane asked.

"We built a robot."

Jane raised an eyebrow. "Wow, you guys really were geeks."

Mike laughed. "And proud of it." He reached into the box again and took out a photograph of him, Lucas, Dustin, and Will that was taken at an amusement park when they were about ten.

"These are them? Your friends?" Jane asked, taking the picture and looking at it closely.

"Yeah. Do you recognize any of them?"

She took a moment before answering, examining each of their faces.

She focused in on Will.

"He looks...I don't know. Not quite familiar, but...that's Will, isn't it?"

Mike nodded. "How did you know that was him?"

"I don't know. It's like I feel...connected to him even though I don't actually remember him. It's hard to explain."

"Maybe it's because you both experienced the upside down."

"Maybe."

"Well, that's that Dustin and that's Lucas," Mike said, pointing to each of his friends.

"You guys look happy."

"That was before our world turned upside down. Literally. But it was all worth it because it brought me to you."

Jane looked him in the eye and for the first time realized just how close Mike was to her. And she knew he realized it too. Mike was reminded of their second kiss at the Snowball. Their first kiss in the cafeteria had been so quick, so spontaneous. But the second kiss was something they were both ready for. Something they both wanted. That's how they felt again, staring at each other. They were so close that it would be easy to kiss. Easy to let themselves fall back into their childhood life.

Mike began closing the gap between them. She could feel his breath on her cheek. She could smell whatever cologne he used and it was intoxicating. Just as his lips touched hers, Jane pulled away. It wasn't a kiss. She had stopped it before it had gotten to that. Mike had a girlfriend and she had no business starting something with someone when she was just starting to figure out her life. Plus she could still feel the alcohol buzzing in her brain.

"I should go," she said, standing up and grabbing her bag.

"You don't have to," he replied.

"I think I do."

"No...Jane..."

She started shoving her feet into her shoes.

"I forgot I had something to do tonight," she lied. As soon as she said it, she knew Mike didn't believe her, but she had to get out of there.

"Please, don't go," Mike begged.

"I'm sorry. I have to go."

"Can I see you again?"

"I'll call you," she answered. "Thank you...for everything. Goodnight," she said.

Jane let herself out. Mike stood, staring after her, not sure of exactly what went wrong.

Author's Note: Thank you to everyone for your amazing comments and suggestions. I know nobody likes Margaret, but I promise there's a reason why she's in the story and you will eventually get to know more about why she and Mike are together. Thanks for reading!

8. Chapter 8

Chapter 8

Mike sat on the floor of his apartment, his brain working in overdrive. The minute Jane had ran out, slamming the door behind her, Mike's knees had given out. He just...fell as if he didn't have the energy to hold himself up anymore. He thought about his next step. Should he run after her? Should he wait a little while and then call her and apologize? Should he call her and tell her that he wasn't sorry? Should he just leave her alone? He knew that wasn't an option. Now that she was back in his life, Mike couldn't imagine his life without her.

Out of the corner of his eye, Mike saw the photograph of him and his friends at the amusement park on the floor. He most likely had dropped it when he had leaned in for the kiss. Mike picked the picture up and stared at it. He had been happy then. Just a kid enjoying a sunny day out with his friends. Mike realized that he had been chasing that happiness all of his adult life and he knew that Eleven was the key to finding it.

Finally, Mike rose up off the floor with the picture in hand. He walked across the living room and propped the picture up against the TV. He didn't know what to do about Jane in that moment, but he did decide that it was time to unpack his childhood boxes and put up more reminders of the best years of his life.

As he turned to go into the spare bedroom, Mike saw it. Margaret. Her framed picture. The one she insisted he have up in his apartment. Mike turned away from the picture and zeroed in on where Jane had sat at dinner. The framed photograph was on the shelf exactly across the room from Jane's chair. Mike made his way over to the table and sat down in Jane's seat. The photograph was staring straight at him. Mike could only imagine what Jane was thinking. It was as if Margaret were there, taunting her.

"Stupid," he said out loud to himself. He was stupid. He could clearly see Margaret's picture from the seat that Jane had been sitting in. Why hadn't Mike thought about that? Why hadn't he taken the

photograph down? Why was it there in the first place? He certainly didn't want it there. But he hadn't fought Margaret about it because it wasn't worth the fight. But Jane was. Jane was worth the fight.

In that moment Mike knew that if he wanted any future with Jane, he needed to break up with Margaret. He wasn't even sure why he was still with her. He knew it was just convenience. It was a lot easier to stay with her and not cause any problems between Mike and her father at work. But things were different now. Now Mike had Jane and he wanted her more than he had wanted anything in his life. As Mike picked up his phone to call Margaret and end it for good, his phone rang. Mike looked over at the caller ID, hoping it was Jane. He was ready to tell her that he was all in and that Margaret didn't matter to him. But it wasn't Jane.

Mike picked up the phone.

"Hey Will," he said.

"Hey Mike, how's it going?" Will replied. Mike immediately felt at ease. He had almost forgotten how comforting it was to talk to his best friend. It had been weeks since he had talked to any of his friends on the phone. It felt good to connect with even just one of them again. He had never found friends in San Francisco like the ones he had left behind. Thousands of miles separated them, but it didn't matter. They were, and always would be, best friends.

"Ah...ok," Mike answered truthfully.

"Just ok?"

Mike brought the phone over to his living room and flopped down on the couch. He put his feet up on the coffee table almost knocking the dented can onto the floor. It was time to come clean. It was time to tell Will everything. He wasn't sure why he hadn't called Will, Lucas, and Dustin the second he had found Eleven, but he hadn't. Perhaps he wanted to make sure it was all real and that he wasn't crazy. Or maybe he did want to keep her to himself just a little bit longer. But it was time for his friends to know the truth.

"I found her," Mike stated.

"Found who?"

"Eleven. I found Eleven."

There was no response. Mike waited patiently. He knew Will was going over what he had just said in his head. Mike would have done the same thing if one of the boys had called him up and told him the same thing.

"You found Eleven?" Will asked, skepticism in his voice.

"Yes."

"How?"

"She was just here. In San Francisco. We ran into each other basically by accident."

"You just...ran into each other?"

"Yeah, it was the craziest thing."

"And did she explain where's she been all this time?" Will asked.

"Why she left Hawkins?"

"It's a long story, but she didn't remember who she was. Hopper, who she thought was her real father, took her away and erased her memory and raised her as somebody else."

"Why would he do that?" Will asked.

"To protect her. I had to convince her of who she really was. And let me tell you, it took some convincing." Mike waited for Will to say something, but he heard nothing. He wondered if they got disconnected. "Will?"

"I'm still here," Will said.

"You don't sound very...excited," Mike said. "I mean, I found the girl we've been looking for for fifteen years."

"That's great, Mike, but..."

Mike was confused. Why was Will acting so suspicious? Why wasn't

he happy?

"But what?" Mike pressed.

"Are you...sure it's her?"

"Of course I'm sure," Mike replied quickly, surprised at Will's question.

"I know you've been looking for Eleven basically you're whole life and maybe you want this woman so badly to be here that you..."

"It's her," Mike stated. "She has Eleven's eyes. She has her nose, her chin, her lips...everything. And she has memories of us."

"You just said her memories were erased."

"They were, but she dreams about things. Things that really happened."

"She dreams? Mike, do you know how that sounds? You find a random woman and feed her all of this information about our childhood and then she starts remembering things? That sounds a little far-fetched."

"I know it sounds crazy, but I found her. I know it's her. She's smart and she's beautiful and she has a good heart and..."

"Are you sleeping with her?" Will interrupted.

"What?"

"It sounds like you're so into this woman that you're not willing to accept that it might not be Eleven."

"She is Eleven."

"Look, this woman sounds wonderful, but what if she's after something?"

"After what?"

"I don't know. Your money?"

"I'm well-off, but I'm not loaded," Mike told him. "And she doesn't care about money. You should see her, Will. It's just like the old Eleven we remember."

"I don't want to see you get hurt," Will said quietly.

"It's her," Mike repeated. He sighed. The conversation with Will was not going as planned. He thought Will would be ecstatic that Mike had found Eleven, but he was wrong. "She has powers just like Eleven. She can open doors and crush soda cans. She even still gets nosebleeds."

"So maybe it is her," Will said. "But did you ever stop to think that maybe she's playing you?"

"Playing me? Why would she do that?"

"I don't know. But it seems strange that you just happened to bump into her on a street corner in a city of thousands. Maybe she's working for the government and has some strange ploy to get you to do something."

"Now you're the one who sounds crazy."

"I'm just trying to look out for you. And what about Margaret?"

"What about Margaret?" Mike snapped back.

"Last I knew, you two were still dating."

"We are...technically. But I'm breaking up with her."

"Because of Eleven?" Will wondered.

"Yes, but also because she and I aren't right for each other."

"Won't that cause some problems at work?"

"Maybe," Mike admitted. "But I'm not going to stay in a bad relationship just because of work. And I'm not going to lose Eleven just because I'm with another woman who I don't even really have feelings for anymore."

"Just be careful, Mike," Will cautioned. "I'd hate for you to mess up your life for a woman who may or may not be Eleven and who may or may not have ulterior motives."

"You'll see," Mike replied. "You'll see that she is Eleven and that she doesn't have any ulterior motives."

"I hope I'm wrong," Will said. "I'd like to meet her. See her for myself."

"You mean see her again," Mike corrected.

"Yeah, sure."

"Look, I gotta go," Mike said after a pause.

"Mike, don't be angry. I just..."

"I'll talk to you later."

Before Will could respond, Mike hung up the phone. He had half a mind to throw the phone across the room. He was angry. What started out as excitement over telling Will about finally finding Eleven turned into irritation and annoyance. Will was supposed to be on his side. He was supposed to support Mike no matter what. That's what friends did. But Mike didn't feel supported. He felt attacked. And worse, Will had put thoughts in his head that Mike hadn't considered before. What if Jane's act was just that? An act? What if she knew she had been Eleven all along? What if she was using him for some reason? And what if breaking up with Margaret proved to be a mistake? Mike knew that it could mess up his relationship with Jeff. And not everything was bad with Margaret. They had some good times. More confused than ever, Mike flopped his head back on the couch, closed his eyes, and sighed.

The Next Day

At 8:00 AM, Mike hopped into his car, but he wasn't headed to work. He had called the guys on his team and told them he was going to be about an hour or two late. Gordon, the one who answered, seemed almost confused. Mike had never been late a day in his life. Mike explained that he had some personal business to attend to. Gordon

seemed even more confused. Mike hung up the phone before Gordon could ask any questions. He knew his team would survive without him for just an hour. After all, he did have something important to do.

Mike followed the directions he had printed out from the online mapping program he had looked up the night before. He drove outside the city until he saw less buildings and more trees and white picket fences around modest homes. Eventually even the homes started to dissipate and instead Mike saw green grass as far as the eye could see. He rolled down the windows and let the warm air into his car.

After taking one wrong turn where he was supposed to take a left instead of a right, Mike finally pulled up at his destination. The sign on the cemetery gates said Northpoint Burial Grounds. Mike was in the right place. He put the car in park and turned off the engine. Mike pocketed his keys and walked into the cemetery. The landscaping was beautiful. The grass was perfectly green. Each gravestone was clean and in good condition. Mike didn't exactly know where he was going, but he just walked. Some of the graves dated back to the early 1900's, but most were from the 1950's and later. In the middle of the cemetery was a large water fountain made from stone. Mike found it to be quite beautiful. It was the perfect spot to spend eternity.

"Can I help you?" A female voice asked.

Mike turned around to face a sixty-something year old woman in a pair of blue overalls. Her graying hair was tucked inside a red bandana. She had a rake in one hand and a pair of gardening gloves sticking out of her pockets.

"Maybe," Mike answered. "I'm looking for...someone. I don't know where he's buried."

"A relative of yours?" The woman asked.

"A friend. A friend I didn't know passed away. I'd like to pay my respects."

The woman smiled. "It's nice to see a polite young person," she said. "I'm Ruby. My husband Mac is the official caretaker of this place, but I volunteer my time to keep it beautiful."

"Well, you both do an amazing job. This is a beautiful spot."

"Thank you. My husband and I have been working on this property for over thirty years. I know most of the headstones. What's the name of your friend?"

Mike had to stop himself from saying 'Jim Hopper.'

"Raymond Smith," Mike answered.

"Oh. We have a lot of Smiths."

"I can just look around," Mike assured her, not wanting her to feel bad that she couldn't help him.

"You didn't let me finish. We have a lot of Smiths, but I know which one you want."

"You do?"

"Follow me."

Using the rake as a kind of walking stick, Ruby led Mike away from the fountain and down a walking path. For the first time, Mike saw just how big the cemetery was. He would never have found the right gravestone on his own.

After about a ten minute walk, Ruby stopped in front of a headstone. Mike looked at it. The headstone itself was simple. It read 'Raymond Smith. Devoted father. 1942 – 1996.'

"What made you remember this headstone?" Mike asked.

"His daughter visits every Sunday," Ruby explained. "Like I said, I've been here a long time. I've never seen anyone so dedicated as that. Only..."

"Only...what?"

"She didn't come this past Sunday."

"Are you sure?"

Ruby nodded. "I always weed this area on Sundays. She didn't come. Do you...know her?"

"Yes. We were childhood friends. We recently...reconnected."

"That's sweet. She always looks...lonely when I see her. It's a sad thing to see a pretty, young woman looking so lonely. She is alright, isn't she? I worried when I didn't see her on Sunday."

Mike didn't quite know how to answer. Was she alright? And why hadn't she visited her father on Sunday? Was it because of Mike? Had Jane not come because she was questioning her relationship with her father? Was she angry with her father? And was it Mike's fault?

"She's ok," Mike finally said.

"Well, that is a relief. You take all the time you need. I'm sure he'll appreciate the company."

"Thank you," Mike said.

Ruby walked away, leaving Mike alone with the grave of the man he had known as Chief Jim Hopper. The man who, Mike had to admit, scared him just a little when he was a kid. He was also the man who had taken Eleven away from him. Mike stared at the headstone and wondered what he was going to say.

Author's Note: So, this chapter was not supposed to exist. But I thought it was about time to bring in Will and for Mike to start questioning some things before we move onto other things. Anyway, sorry it has taken me so long to update. This week has been a bit nuts! Thanks for reading and sticking with me!

9. Chapter 9

Chapter 9

What was he going to say? He hadn't thought about that when he made the decision to visit Jim Hopper's grave. But after Jane had left his apartment in a hurry because he tried to kiss her and Mike had had his conversation with Will over whether Jane was truly Eleven, Mike felt like he had to see Hopper. Since he couldn't actually talk to the man, he had to do the next best thing.

"Hey Chief Hopper," Mike said. He felt rather foolish talking out loud to a headstone, but he continued anyway. "It's me, Mike Wheeler. I bet you'd never thought you'd see me again, huh? Well, I'm here. Of course I don't really know why I'm here. It seemed like a good idea at the time to look up your obituary and find the cemetery you were buried in and drive out here. And now I'm here and...and I don't know what to say."

Mike paused and looked around. Even though he knew he was alone, he wanted to make sure of it. He didn't want anyone seeing him talking to himself.

"I found her," Mike continued. "I found El. Or maybe she found me. I don't know. It seems crazy, right? I mean, how do two people find each other fifteen years later thousands of miles away from where they last saw each other? That's what Will would say anyway. I get it. I get why's he's skeptical. I mean, it does sound crazy, but...but I know it's her. In my heart I know it's her."

The more Mike said it out loud, the more he was sure it was true.

"Jane is great," Mike continued. "She's smart and kind and beautiful. But you already know that because you raised her. I just...I just have to ask...why? Why'd you take her from me? I know you wanted to protect her, but why didn't you tell me? I hated myself for a long time for losing her. I blamed you, I blamed me, I blamed her. It wasn't easy."

He felt a wave of sadness come over him. Mike realized he was

letting go of so many feelings he had held onto for so long.

"I guess I came here today because I thought you might have some answers for me. Is this all real? Maybe if you could just...send me a sign or something, I'd know that it was real..." Mike trailed off. He was being ridiculous. He was talking to a dead man. But it felt right. Mike felt more at peace in the cemetery than he had in days.

"I'm sorry if I'm the one who stopped her from visiting you last Sunday. If she...if she ever speaks to me again, I'll make sure she comes back. I think...I think a small part of me will always be angry with you for taking her away from me. I know you had your reasons. I know you did everything you could to protect her and I suppose I should be thanking you for that. I just...I hope it's not too late. I hope we can have the future we were meant to have."

Mike looked around as if waiting for something to happen. He had poured his heart out to a piece of stone. He knew there would be no response, but that didn't mean that he didn't want one.

"Anyway, thanks for letting me...talk," Mike said finally. "It has really helped. I should...I should probably go."

Mike took one last look at the headstone. Somehow he knew it wouldn't be the last time he saw it.

Mike turned and walked away. He thanked Ruby, who was on her knees planting flowers near the water fountain, and went to his car. Mike started the engine and drove off. He wasn't in the mood to go to work, but he knew he had a meeting in the afternoon that he couldn't miss. Besides, Mike had never played hooky in his life.

But Mike did take his time driving back towards San Francisco. When he pulled into the parking garage at his office building, he did so with sadness. The last thing he wanted to do was go to work. He wanted to find Jane and talk to her. He wanted to call Will and tell him that he was wrong about Jane. He wanted to find Margaret and break up with her. But first he had to work.

By the time he got off the elevator and onto his floor, Mike was already being followed by two of the guys on his team. They were

peppering him with questions about some code they were working on. Mike waved them off, telling them that they needed to start taking more initiative to solve problems on their own. Mike would help them later. He made his way into his office, closing the door in Gordon's face. When Mike got to his desk, he saw a stack of mail waiting for him. The mail got delivered daily by one of the three members of the mail room. With a company that big, mail was always coming in and interoffice mail was always being sent and received. Mike had a few large manila envelopes on his desk sent from the business office. He shuffled past those, knowing that they probably included forms for him to fill out for who knows what. At the bottom of the pile was a grocery store ad. It was rare to get ads in the mail at the office. Even though stores would send things to the office building, the mail department usually just recycled them immediately. Jeff had a strong policy that the mail was not to be used for advertisements or personal use. Deciding that somehow the grocery store circular just got mixed up in the pile, Mike went to dump it in the trash under his desk. But then he saw one of the items on the cover that was on sale.

"Eggo's," Mike said out loud to himself. Eggo waffles were on sale. Fives boxes for eleven dollars. Mike wasn't sure if he believed in heaven or hell or God or whatever, but he looked up towards the ceiling of his office building. He imagined himself looking past the plaster above him and up beyond into the sky. He smiled.

"Thank you," he said.

He had asked Hopper for a sign and he had gotten one. Things were going to be ok. Mike was brought back to reality when the door to his office opened. Mike looked to see who it was. Her name was Carla Ross and she was the head of human resources. She was tough as nails, brilliant, and old enough to be Mike's grandmother. But she did a hell of a job and was Jeff's right hand woman.

"Jeff moved the meeting up," she informed Mike.

"To when?"

"Now," she said.

"What's the hurry?"

Carla shrugged. "I don't know, but you better come with me."

The last thing Mike wanted to do was go to a meeting, but he knew he had no choice. Grabbing a file folder from his desk that he had prepared a few days earlier, Mike followed Carla to the large conference room. Several other men were already sitting. Mike politely said "hello" to them all before he took his seat.

Two hours later, Mike was tapping his pencil against his yellow memo pad. He wasn't listening to a word Jeff was saying at the head of the boardroom. After a brief update from Carla about some new hires, Jeff has spent most of the two hours presenting the company's newest stock numbers and potential partners. Mike was supposed to be paying attention. He was supposed to report in about the newest development that the computer coders were working on after Jeff was done, but he could barely concentrate. He just wanted to be done. He was making a mental checklist of the things he needed to do. Step one was break up with Margaret. Step two was to apologize to Jane and tell her he broke up with Margaret. Step three was to call Will and tell him that he was all wrong about Jane. Mike's trip to Hopper's grave had made him 100% sure that Jane was Eleven and that she had no ulterior motives. Step four was to spend the rest of his life with Jane.

"Michael?" Jeff's voice rang out. "Michael?"

Mike stopped tapping his pencil and looked up at his boss. Carla and the other men around the table were staring at him. Mike felt like he was in school again when a teacher called on him, but he missed the question.

"Sorry," he said.

"Are you alright?" Jeff asked.

"Yes."

"Busy thinking about the newest programs we're rolling out next month, I hope."

"Yeah, that's it," Mike lied.

"Well, why don't we move on to more important matters. Our annual gala is this weekend and we don't have a charity to donate our proceeds to," Jeff announced.

Mike had to hand it to the man. Even though Jeff loved his money and spent it well, he also had a heart. Each year, the company through a big gala, charging a ridiculous amount of money per person to attend. The biggest names from the San Francisco area including celebrities, the mayor, and every head of every big company would be there. All of the money that was made would be donated to a charity. Every year Jeff picked a different group to receive the funds. Everything from animal rescue leagues to clean water efforts in foreign countries to cancer research programs had been selected in the past.

"What happened to the military organization we had already selected?" One of the men in the room asked.

"Turns out the president of the organization was embezzling money," Jeff answered. "So we're back to square one. And we only have a few days to find a cause. Any suggestions?"

"What about..." the woman began to say.

"The state foster care system," Mike interrupted, the idea suddenly hitting him.

"What?" Jeff asked.

"There are hundreds of kids in San Francisco that are in the foster care system. The state doesn't have the money or the manpower to help them all and they need help. Look, we've given to organizations all over the world. Why not help the kids in our backyards?"

Jeff mulled over the suggestion. He nodded.

"I like it. I'll contact the mayor and have him send us a representative to come to the gala."

"I have somebody," Mike said, thinking of Jane. This would be his

chance to see her again and to make sense of what was going on. "A friend. She's a social worker. She works for the state."

"Good. Invite her. Mike, do you care if we postpone your presentation until next week's meeting?"

Mike shook his head. He was pretty sure that if he tried to present anything, it would just come out as gibberish.

"Works for me," Mike said.

"Alright then. Meeting is adjourned. Now, back to work everybody."

Mike picked up his notepad, which he had written nothing on, and slipped his pen behind his ear. The others left the room. Mike was about to head out the door, when Jeff said his name. He turned back.

"Is there something else?" Mike asked.

"Margaret came to me," Jeff began. "She said you haven't been very...attentive recently since she's been back from Milan."

Mike had to stop himself from physically cringing. He liked his boss, but he hated that Margaret would run to her father any time there was anything wrong with their relationship.

"I've been busy," Mike responded.

"I told her that. But maybe you want to...give her a little attention."

"Yes, sir."

"That's my boy."

Mike walked out of the conference room and headed for his office. Despite what he had just promised his boss, Mike knew he had to end things with Margaret. He had known it for a long time, even before Jane had walked into his life, but had just been too chicken to actually do it. No matter what the professional ramifications were, Mike was going to break up with her.

Putting the thoughts of Margaret aside, Mike focused on what he

really wanted to do. He sat at his computer and quickly looked up the information he needed. He dialed the phone number from his screen. After going through a few automatic prompts, Mike finally heard someone answer the phone.

"Human Services Agency," the female voice said. "This is Sheila. Can I help you?"

"Can I speak to Jane Smith please," Mike replied.

"Just a moment."

The woman put him on hold. Mike waited, listening to the instrumental music. Less than a minute later, he heard Jane's familiar voice.

"This is Jane Smith. How can I help you?"

The visit to Hopper's grave and seeing the Eggo waffles on sale was enough of a sign that Jane was Eleven. The sound of her voice was just more proof. Mike knew that all of the thoughts Will had put into his head were wrong. Jane was Eleven and there were no ulterior motives or reasons why Jane would lie to him about knowing who she was. And it wasn't a coincidence why Mike had run into Jane on the street that day. It was fate. Just like it was fate that he and his friends found her in the woods. They were meant to be together and Mike wasn't going to let anything stand in the way of that.

"Hi Jane," Mike said.

She didn't respond right away. Mike guessed she was surprised to hear his voice.

"How did you get this number?" She asked.

"It's not hard to look you up. I'm sorry if I crossed a line."

"No, it's ok. I just...I'm surprised to hear from you. That's all. What can I do for you, Mike?"

Mike wanted to say *I miss you*. He wanted to tell Jane that things were over with Margaret and he wanted Jane in his life, but he knew

he couldn't lay it all out like that. Not just yet anyway. His first step was to break up with Margaret. Then he could tell Jane how he felt about her.

"My company is holding a party," Mike explained to her, trying to stick to business. "A...gala actually."

"The annual Thompson Gala. I've heard of it."

"I know this is short notice because it's this weekend, but I want you to come."

There was a pause. "I...can't."

"Why not?" Mike asked.

"Do I really have to say it out loud?" She responded.

"This is about the other night, isn't it?" He said. "Look, Jane..."

"You have a girlfriend," she whispered. "And I'm at work. I have to go."

"They want to give the money to your department," Mike quickly told her before she could hang up.

"What?"

"The Human Services Agency. Thompson wants to give the money to help the kids in foster care."

"Are you serious?"

"Yes."

"That's...thousands of dollars."

"Hundreds of thousands," Mike corrected.

"Why?"

"Because it's a worthy cause."

"Did you have something to do with this?" She asked.

"Does it matter? I told him I knew someone who could represent the organization at the gala. Please come."

"I don't...I wouldn't have anything to wear. It's not like I go to galas very often."

"It doesn't matter what you wear."

"Oh so I can show up in my white sneakers?"

Mike laughed. "You'd be beautiful no matter what you wear."

Jane was silent again. "Alright," she finally said after a long pause. "I'll come, but only because the money will help countless children."

"Ok. I can drop off an invitation at your office or..."

"Just mail it to me," she said.

"Alright. Look, Jane about Margaret..."

"I have to go," she said and the line went dead. Mike hung up his phone. Why did it feel like she was always running away from him?

Author's Note: I don't have much to say except thanks for reading and for your wonderful comments. The next chapter is almost done so I hope to post soon!

10. Chapter 10

Chapter 10

Mike stood in his perfectly tailored black tuxedo with a glass of champagne in his hand. He scanned the room. The huge ballroom was full of men in tuxedos and women in ball gowns. When Mike attended his first charity gala with the company, he was impressed by all of the glitz and sparkle. Years later, he was no longer mesmerized. It was the same people doing the same thing year after year. But this year would be different. Because this year, he would be with Jane.

At the thought of her, Mike imagined the kiss that almost happened in his apartment. His lips had made contact with hers, but she had pulled away before he could actually kiss her. He wanted to kiss her badly and not like they had kissed at the Snowball as kids. He wanted to taste her, to feel her skin beneath his fingertips, to kiss her so hard that her lips bruised and her cheeks flushed. Lost in his daydream, Mike didn't see Jeff Thompson, his boss, walking towards him.

"Enjoying yourself?" Jeff asked with a glass of wine in his hand.

"It's a great event as always," Mike answered, pulling himself from his thoughts.

"And where is your special guest? We have a very large sum of money to hand over to her tonight."

"She'll be here," Mike replied, hoping that were true. He hadn't spoken to Jane since he had invited her to the gala. He knew that he and Jane were on thin ice, but he also knew that she wouldn't bail if it meant getting money for the children she helped.

"It's too bad Margaret had to miss the gala this year," Jeff said. "I know she always looks forward to it."

"Yes, well, I'm sure she's enjoying Paris fashion week," Mike said. He almost blurted out right then and there that he was going to break up with Margaret, but he bit his tongue. It wasn't the time or the place. Besides, Margaret deserved to be told first. Mike had tried breaking

up with her already. After inviting Jane to the gala over the phone, Mike had called Margaret to have him meet her for dinner so that he could end things for good. He wasn't going to be one of those guys who broke up with someone over the telephone. He was going to do things right. When she answered the phone, however, she informed him that she would be going to Paris and that he better have a change in attitude by the time she got back. Mike almost broke up with her right then on the phone, but didn't. Maybe it was because it was the easy thing to do – to keep putting it off. After all, it certainly made things easier at work. But Mike knew that he couldn't keep avoiding her. Eventually he would have to do it. And the sooner he did, the sooner he could be with Jane.

"Well, enjoy yourself, Michael," Jeff said. "Introduce me to your guest when she arrives."

"Yes, sir," Mike said.

As Jeff walked away, Mike heard footsteps behind him. He turned and nearly gasped. Jane was standing there with a form fitting, strapless black dress that hugged her in all the right places. It flared out with black feathers towards the bottom. Her hair was pulled up in an exquisite bun with soft, curly tendrils falling around her ears. Her eyes were dark and she had a bright red lipstick on. Mike nearly salivated.

"Hi," she said, approaching him, her high heels clicking against the floor. The feathers on the dress twirled with her every movement.

"You look incredible," Mike managed to say although his mouth had suddenly gone very dry.

Jane looked down at her outfit, slightly embarrassed. "I should. I spent two month's salary on the dress and the hair and..."

"It's not the dress or the hair," he interrupted. "It's you. You're stunning."

Jane wasn't sure what to say. She felt speechless. She knew she should just thank him and move on with the conversation, but she had never had a man look at her the way he was looking at her. It

wasn't just desire for her body that so many other men wanted. He was looking at her like he wanted all of her. Her body, her mind, everything. And Jane realized she wanted him to want her. Isn't that why she bought the more expensive dress even though it cost more than she could afford? Isn't that why she bothered to put on makeup even when she never wore any? She wanted him to notice her. But then she had to remind herself that he was off limits.

"Where's Margaret?" She asked.

"In Paris."

"Oh," she replied quietly, not sure if that was a good or bad thing.

"About Margaret..."

"I don't want to talk about her. I..."

"I'm breaking up with her," Mike blurted out.

"What?"

"I'm done with Margaret. I should have been done a long time ago. And I'm sorry. I know I haven't been very fair to you."

"You don't have to break up with her because of me," Jane said quietly.

"Yes I do. Because I'm falling for you."

"I..." Jane began. She didn't know what to say. She wanted to tell him that she had feelings for him too and that she was glad he was breaking up with his girlfriend, but no words came. She just felt confused.

"Do you want to dance?" Mike asked, saving her from whatever it was that she was about to say.

Jane looked around cautiously. "I don't know how." At first Mike said nothing in response. Then he laughed. It wasn't just a nervous chuckle. It was a loud, boisterous laugh. Jane was surprised at his reaction and a little hurt. "You don't have to laugh at me, I..."

"I'm not laughing at you," he assured her. He took her hand. "It's just that that's exactly what you said to me when I asked you to dance at the Snowball. I asked if you wanted to dance and you said you didn't know how."

"And what did you say?" She wondered.

"I said 'I don't either. Do you want to figure it out?'"

"And then what happened?"

"And...then we danced. So, what do you say? Do you want to figure it out?"

She nodded. She knew she shouldn't. She knew she should just accept the check from the company and be on her way, but dancing with Mike was too tempting.

Mike put his drink down on a nearby hightop table. He took Jane by the hand and let her to the middle of the dance floor. He pulled her in close, putting one arm around her waist. He settled his hand on her lower back. She placed her right hand on his left shoulder. They began to dance to the string quartet that was playing on the stage nearby. Other couples were dancing around them, but Mike didn't pay attention to them. He just stared at Jane as if she was the only one in the room.

"I had another dream," Jane said as they swayed to the music together.

"About what?"

"We were walking together in the woods. You were walking with your bike. You had a cut on your chin."

"Another memory," Mike told her. "Some bullies at school pushed me down. That's why I had the cut."

"You told me about them. About the bullies."

"And you understood me," Mike said. "I didn't need to be ashamed that I was being picked on. You just got it."

"What do you think would have happened to us if I stayed in Hawkins?" Jane asked. "If my father hadn't taken me away."

"I don't know. Maybe we would have started dating. Maybe Hopper would have eventually let you go to school and we'd be high school sweethearts that everyone else is disgusted by because we were always so in love. And maybe we'd have gone to the same college together."

"Or maybe we would have broken up," she suggested.

"Maybe, but I don't think so. We can't change the past. All I know is, you're here now and I don't ever want to let you go again."

"Mike..." Jane said. Things were getting dangerous. He shouldn't be talking to her that way. Even if he said he was going to break up with Margaret, they were officially still together. And he was at a function with all of his colleagues and Margaret's father. The last thing they needed was any public display of affection.

Before she knew it, Mike was leaning in towards her. Jane knew he was going to kiss her and this time she wasn't going to pull away.

"Michael!" A shrill voice nearby called out.

Mike and Jane pulled apart. They both saw Margaret standing before them in a short, sparkly gold dress and matching gold high heels. She had her hands on her hips.

"Margaret," Mike exclaimed, surprised. He immediately stepped back from Jane. "What are you doing here?"

"Stopping whatever this is," she said, pointing to Jane.

"We were just dancing," Mike protested.

Other people stopped dancing and started staring.

"Isn't she the woman who you were doing contract work for? What is she doing here?"

"I invited her as the company's guest," Mike explained. "She works for

the department of human services. She's receiving the check."

Margaret scoffed. "Not if I have anything to say about it."

"Margaret, come on," Mike said. "Nothing was happening. We were dancing. That's all."

Margaret ignored him and turned to Jane. "How dare you try to seduce my fiancé."

Jane looked at Mike. She felt the urge to cry. Fiancé? Mike hadn't mentioned that part. Last Jane knew, Margaret was just his girlfriend and according to Mike, he was going to break up with her. Had he lied to her just to get her to dance with him? Had he asked Margaret to marry her all while helping Jane? While they were getting close?

"Wait...that isn't..." Mike stammered.

Jane's sadness turned to anger and something shifted in her brain. She concentrated all of her energy on Mike. Margaret was by his side, gripping his arm. Jane made the slightest movement with her head and suddenly Margaret's high heel broke. She started to fall. Mike went to help her, but suddenly lost his balance. They both ended up on the ground, Mike falling with a hard thud onto his back. He felt stiff as a board, like he couldn't move. His arms were pinned to his sides and his legs felt like they were glued together.

"What the..." Margaret shrieked, grabbing her broken shoe.

Mike ignored his whining girlfriend. Jane had used her powers. As his paralysis wore off, Mike got to his feet. Margaret was reaching out for him to help her up, but he ignored her. Mike looked around the room, but Jane was gone. By this time, others had assisted Margaret to her feet. She was sobbing hysterically even though Mike knew she wasn't hurt. Mr. Thompson approached them.

"What is going on?" He asked Mike angrily.

"I...I have to go," Mike stammered. He wasn't exactly sure why he was still standing there. Mike took off, running through the ballroom. He raced outside. The valets all stared at him as he burst through the doors. He saw Jane at the end of the street, trying to hail a cab. Mike

ran over to her. When he saw her coming, she tried to turn down the street.

"Leave me alone," she said, rushing off to get away from him.

"You know I can catch you in those heels," he replied, already not far from her.

Jane abruptly stopped. She took off her shoes, standing barefoot on the sidewalk, proving to him that nothing would stop her from getting away from him. She had half a mind to throw the shoes at his head.

"Get away from me or I'll call the police," she warned.

"That's what you said when I first saw you on the street corner."

"Do you think that's funny?" She asked. "Do you think this is funny?"

"No. Of course not."

"Just leave me alone."

"Jane..."

"No! Every time I try to walk away from you, you get me to come back. I'm not coming back this time. I'm done. This...whatever you and I had or might have had...it's over. We're done."

"I don't want to be done."

"You have a fiancé!" She yelled.

"She's not my fiancé."

"You lied to me! You said you were breaking up."

"We are. I will. I just haven't had a chance yet."

"You haven't had a chance? That's the lamest excuse I've ever heard."

"Jane..."

"I don't want to hear anymore lies. Whatever Margaret is or isn't...you're still with her. And that's fine. I can't compete with her." As Jane said it, she felt the sadness rushing in. She had met a guy who finally understood her. A guy who didn't think she was weird. A guy who apparently wanted to do more than sleep with her, but he was with someone else. And the truth was - Jane couldn't compete with the gorgeous, sexy Margaret. Jane wasn't well traveled or exotic. Jane didn't have money. She had nothing to offer him.

"There's no competition," Mike said.

"You can say that all you want, but you know it's not true. I'm not glamorous. I'm not rich. I don't have anything and she...she has everything."

"That's not true," Mike assured her. "You are the one who has everything."

"I don't even know what I'm doing here. A few weeks ago, you were just a stranger on the street. Now I find myself getting dressed up just to impress you. I find myself wanting to be with you. I find myself listening to every word you say about my past even if it's not true."

"It is true. All of it."

"How do I know that?"

"You've seen the proof!" He yelled. "You've seen the photographs and the newspaper articles. Your dreams are memories."

"Or maybe they're just dreams."

"You opened a locked door!" Mike exclaimed, feeling panicked. "You dented a can of soda with your mind!"

"Maybe you rigged those things to make me believe it."

"You don't really think that," he said more quietly. "Besides, how could I have rigged what just happened. You did that. You broke Margaret's heel. You made me feel practically paralyzed. And how do you explain the dreams you've had about you and me?"

"It doesn't matter. I'm done. I'm done with whoever it is you think I am. I'm done with trying to remember the past. I'm done with you. I'm going back to my old life. When I was just Jane Smith who had a memory loss problem."

"Don't say that," he said. "After all we've been through, how can you say that?"

"That's what I want," she told him. "I want to forget about all this. Forget about you. Forget about the girl I used to be."

"Jane..."

"Goodbye Mike. Don't bother following me."

Jane stepped to the edge of the street corner. She raised her arm up and a few moments later, a taxi pulled up to the curb. She lifted the bottom of her dress up so as not to trip on it as she opened the door to the taxi. Mike could see her 'friends don't lie' tattoo clearly on her ankle.

"Jane!"

Jane climbed inside the taxi and slammed the door, keeping her eyes straight forward, away from him. Mike just looked at her through the window.

"Jane please," Mike said. She didn't even look at him. "Eleven!"

Jane turned to face him. She caught his eye just as the taxi drove away. Mike watched it until it was out of sight. He had lost her.

Author's Note: Ok so I'm very happy that we finally got to this chapter. When writing, I usually have a "scene" or idea in my head that shapes the rest of the story. This was the moment that came to me first and that started this whole story. Anyway, I hope you liked it and I promise there's more Mileven to come. All hope is not lost! As of right now, there are 8 more chapters (but that is likely to change) so stay tuned!

11. Chapter 11

Chapter 11

Sitting at his desk, Mike could see Gordon, his co-worker walking by, staring at him through his open door. Mike glared right back and the man picked up his pace until he was out of sight. Mike did not appreciate the gawkers who had been casually walking by his office all morning just to get a look at him. It was Monday and it was barely lunchtime. Mike thought everyone might have calmed down over the weekend about what had happened on Saturday night at the gala. But he was wrong. He underestimated the scene he had caused. Not only was there no one to accept the check from Thompson's after Jane ran away, but everyone had seen Mike practically kiss her in the middle of the dance floor. And they all knew that Mike was supposed to be dating the boss's daughter.

Mike had also heard a rumor going around about how Jane had pushed Margaret down, breaking her shoe. Although Jane technically had broken her shoe, Mike knew that nobody could prove that. Jane hadn't laid a hand on her. But that didn't stop the rumor mill from describing the 'cat fight' in great detail. Every time Mike heard the story, it was more embellished and more wrong. But Mike refused to comment on any of it. He had shut himself in his office and wasn't going to come out.

Mike sure had made a mess of things, but it wasn't Margaret or his job that he cared about. It was Jane. He had no way to get in touch with her over the weekend. He didn't have her cell phone number and he didn't know where she lived. He had stopped by the cafe where they first met, hoping to run into her, but she hadn't shown up there. He thought about getting one of his computer geek co-workers to somehow track her down, but he shot down that idea. She had made it pretty clear that she was done with him. But he wasn't done with her.

Mike wasn't having any luck talking to Margaret either. She was ignoring his calls. Even when he had shown up at her doorstep, she refused to answer the door. Mike only wanted to talk to her to break up with her. That was it. There was nothing else to be said or done.

"Michael," Mr. Thompson's voice rang out.

Mike looked up from his desk. Mr. Thompson was standing in his doorway along with Margaret. Unlike her usual put together self, she looked a mess. Her hair was in a messy ponytail, her mascara was smudged, and for once she looked like a normal person in normal clothes, not some super expensive dress.

"Sir," Michael said, standing up. "Margaret, how are you?"

"How dare you ask me that!" She spat. "After you humiliated me in front of everyone."

She sobbed, dabbing her eyes with a tissue in her hand. It was a convincing act, but Mike knew it was all pretend. By the look in Jeff Thompson's eyes, though, he was falling for it hook, line, and sinker.

"Let's have a chat," Mr. Thompson suggested, giving Mike no room for argument. Margaret and Mr. Thompson entered the office. Mr. Thompson closed the door and sat down in front of Mike's desk.

"I've been trying to call you," Michael said to Margaret.

"I didn't feel like talking," she sniffed.

"Look, Michael, I don't know what's gotten into you lately, but I did not like the behavior I saw at the gala this weekend. Now, I'm sure if you apologized to Margaret and promised her that you will never do anything like that again, she'll be more than happy to forget this ever happened."

"Once we announce our engagement, people are sure to..." Margaret began.

"Engagement?" Mike question. "We were never engaged."

"Perhaps a ring hasn't been given," Mr. Thompson said. "But you and my daughter have been dating long enough."

"It's only been a year," Mike reminded them.

"Which is plenty of time to make a commitment" Jeff replied. "It's

time you grow up and promise yourself to her. Promise yourself to each other."

"I'm sorry, sir," Mike interrupted. "But that is none of your business."

"Excuse me?" Mr. Thompson replied, surprised as Mike's boldness.

"This is between me and Margaret," Mike said. "Our relationship. She's twenty-five for goodness sake. I think she's old enough to talk to her boyfriend without having her father in the room."

"How dare you talk to my father like that!" Margaret cried.

"I'm surprised at you, Michael," Mr. Thompson said sternly. "After all this company has done for you. After all I've done for you."

"You're right, sir. You have done a lot for me and I'll be forever grateful for that. But don't forget that I've done a lot for this company. It was my idea and software that you sold for millions. It's me who keeps all of the programmers on task. And as for you, Margaret, I won't be coerced into an engagement. The truth is I don't love you. I don't think I ever have."

"It's all her fault!" Margaret shouted, standing up. She pointed a finger at Mike. "That woman! That horrible, plain, stupid woman did this! Are you having an affair with her? Are you sleeping with her?"

"No," Michael answered truthfully. "And this isn't about Jane. This is about my happiness. You don't make me happy, Margaret. And I'm pretty sure if you look deep enough, you'll realize that I don't make you happy either."

"You've wasted the last year of my life!" She screamed.

"I'm sorry," Mike apologized and he meant it. He hadn't meant to string her along. But she was also the one who had changed so much in their relationship. She was not the person that Mike had first started dating.

"Well, this certainly has been an enlightening day," Mr. Thompson said, standing up. "I'm sorry, Michael, but I have no choice. You're fired."

Mike should have been surprised, but he wasn't. After all, wasn't his job the reason he had stayed with Margaret in the first place? He had been afraid that breaking up with her would mean he would lose his job. And he had been right. But Mike wasn't surprised. And he wasn't angry either.

"That won't be necessary, sir," Mike stated calmly. "I quit."

Mike grabbed a box that had a few reams of paper in it for his printer. He tipped the box over, dumping the packs of paper onto the ground with a thud. Mike look at his desk and realized that he had nothing of personal value. Why had he never noticed that before? He had no photographs of his family, no trinkets or mementos. His desk simply held all of the things he needed for work. Mike realized for the first time that even though he had worked for Thompson's for years and had watched it grow into the company it was, it was never home. Mike dropped the empty box. He wouldn't be taking anything with him. Margaret and Mr. Thompson were watching him, wide-eyed.

"Goodbye," Mike said.

Grabbing his briefcase, Mike left his office. He walked to the elevator with a smile on his face.

After dropping his things off at his apartment and changing into a pair of Jeans and a grey V-Neck, Mike hit the streets of San Francisco. He had never had this much freedom before. He was single and without a job. He should be terrified, but he wasn't. All he wanted to do was enjoy the beautiful day. After all, when was the last time he had nothing to do on Monday at one in the afternoon? Mike thought about going down to the Pier to see the sea lions or maybe he'd even take one of those stupid, touristy bay cruises that he never got to take. But Mike wasn't interested in any of those things. Not without Jane.

Before he knew it, Mike found himself standing outside of the Building for Human Services. He knew he could go in and simply ask for Jane. He could lie to the receptionist and tell her that he had an appointment or that his family was in need of assistance. Then again, his three hundred dollar shoes said otherwise. Mike would definitely

have to stop buying those now that he was unemployed. Mike eventually decided just to wait. Jane would have to come out of the building sooner or later. Across the street was a small deli. Mike went in, ordered some lunch and picked a seat by the window so that he could see the entrance of the building. Then, he waited.

Four hours and \$53 in sandwiches, muffins, and coffee later, Mike was still sitting at the table in the deli. After about two hours of sitting, the deli owner had politely asked Mike to leave. When Mike explained that the love of his life worked in the building across the street, but that he had screwed up royally and needed to get her back, the man invited Mike to stay as long as he wanted.

"We close at six," the man said from behind the counter.

Mike looked at the clock on the wall. It was 5:30. Around 5:00, a rush of people had left the building that Jane worked in. Jane wasn't one of them. She hadn't come out of or gone into the building since Mike had arrived. It was possible she wasn't even working. Mike hadn't thought of that.

"I'm sorry to have bothered you," Mike said, standing up.

"Look, some of the employees across the street come over here for lunch every once in a while. If I see your girl, want me to tell her you're looking for her?"

Mike shook his head. "No thank you."

"Don't give up," the man said. "If it's meant to be, you'll find her again."

"Thanks," Mike replied.

He paid the bill and left a \$20 tip on the table and walked out of the deli. Just as he turned to head back towards his apartment, the whole afternoon wasted, he saw the door to the Human Services building open. With her satchel slung over her shoulder, Jane appeared in the doorway. She looked both ways down the sidewalk out of habit before her eyes landed on Mike across the street. She stared at him, blinking a few times.

"Hi," he said, realizing then that he should have put more thought into what he was going to say to her.

"I told you I didn't want to see you," she stammered, barely audible over the cars that were whizzing by between them.

"I know. I'm sorry. I had to see you again." Mike looked both ways, attempting to cross the street.

"No. No, I'm done."

Jane began briskly walking down the sidewalk, away from him. Mike stepped off the curb and a car honked at him. There were too many cars to cross the street at that moment so he went in the same direction she was going. There were walking parallel to each other with a street in between them.

"Please, Jane, let me explain."

She didn't stop, keeping her head down low

"There's nothing to explain. I told you, I'm done!"

"I broke up with Margaret!"

Jane stopped. She turned to look at him. A large minivan obstructed their view. It was stopped at a red light. Mike didn't want to lose sight of her. Despite the fact that traffic was still coming from the opposite direction, Mike darted into the street. One car slammed on its breaks and two others beeped at him. Mike waved his apology at them as he made it safely to the other side. He practically sprinted over to where Jane stood.

"Are you crazy? You could have been killed!"

"I wasn't about to lose you again."

"I told you I don't want to see you anymore."

"Did you hear me?" Mike exclaimed, almost breathless. "I broke up with Margaret."

"Well, I'm happy for you, but that doesn't change things. I told you

I'm through and I meant it."

"I get it. I get why you're angry. You have every right to be. I was... stupid. I should have broken up with her the moment I saw you again. But I was scared. And I know that's no excuse. All I can say is that I'm sorry. I'm sorry for everything I put you through. And I promise you that Margaret and I were never engaged. She just said that to...get everybody's attention. I had every intention of breaking up with her like I told you. And I know that's no excuse. I should have ended things sooner with her, but I wanted to tell you the truth. Because friends don't lie, right?"

He smiled at her weakly, hoping she would see that he was truly sorry. She looked at him, weighing her options. She could walk away and try to forget him. But she knew she could never really forget him.

"Have you been waiting for me all day?" She asked.

Mike nodded. "Pretty much."

"What about your job?"

"I quit."

"You...what?"

"I quit," he repeated.

"Why?" Jane asked cautiously.

"Because I didn't want to work for Thompson's anymore. Because it wasn't home for me. I didn't..."

"No," she interrupted. "Why did you break up with Margaret?"

Mike sighed. "Because I should have done it a long time ago. I don't love her. I never have. She was just...convenient, which I know sounds terrible. And it is. I wasn't fair to her or to myself and I'll forever be sorry for that. I wasn't happy, Jane. And I don't think I realized just how unhappy I was until you came back into my life. You make me happy."

"I...I don't know what to say. I...I blocked you out. I told myself that you and that part of my life was done and now...now here you are again and...and part of me is so...angry with you."

"I know. I deserve that. I'm angry with me too, but I promise I'll do everything I can to make it up to you." He paused. "We don't have to rush things. We can just be friends. I just...I don't want to lose you. I can't lose you. What do you say? Will you give me another chance?"

"I...I..." Jane stuttered, not sure what to do or what to say. She didn't speak for a long time. She just looked into Mike's eyes. She saw the same eyes staring at her as the ones from her dreams. The same eyes that gave her comfort and made her feel safe.

"I want to show you something," she finally said.

"Show me something?"

"Would you come with me?" She asked.

He nodded. "Ok."

Jane began walking and Mike followed. He didn't know where they were going or whether she would ever really forgive him, but he didn't care. All that mattered is that they were together again.

Author's Note: I told you all hope wasn't lost! Our dynamic duo is back together again...for now. Thanks for reading and don't forget to let me know your thoughts by leaving a review!

12. Chapter 12

Chapter 12

Mike and Jane sat in the back of a taxi, neither of them speaking. Mike glanced over at her, but Jane was staring straight ahead. Jane had given the taxi driver an address outside of San Francisco that Mike didn't recognize.

"You're not taking me to some remote location to murder me, are you?" He whispered to her so the driver couldn't overhear.

She laughed. "No."

"Because I'll have you know," he said. "I carry mace."

She looked at him with a raised eyebrow. "That's my line."

He laughed. "I know. The truth is, I don't have mace."

"Neither did I," she admitted with a smile.

Mike was glad to see her smiling and even happier that they had fallen back into what felt like their old friendship. He knew, though, that he had a lot to make up for and that Jane wasn't going to let him off the hook quite that easily.

"We're almost there," Jane announced.

A few minutes later, the taxi pulled up in front of a storage rental facility. Jane paid the driver and got out of the cab. Mike followed. She walked through the outdoor facility, passing storage units. She finally stopped in front of one, dug around in her coat pocket for a key, and opened the garage style door. Inside the unit were neatly stacked plain, white boxes. They were the kind, Mike knew, that perfectly fit file folders. The basement on Thompson's was full of them.

"What is all this?" Mike asked.

"My father's things."

"Why are we here?"

"After my father died, I donated a lot of his personal things. It was hard having them around the house and I knew someone out there needed them more than I did. But I put all of his files and paperwork from his PI office into storage. I didn't know what else to do with it. It didn't seem right just to throw it all away. It was his life's work. Or...at least the part of his life he shared with me."

"So...what did you want to show me?" Mike questioned. It didn't look like anyone had gone through the boxes in years. There was a layer of dust on top of the boxes and nothing looked disturbed.

"I remember meeting him at his office one day for lunch and when I got there, he was putting some things away into one of the boxes. The minute I came in, he slammed the cover on like he didn't want me to see what was inside."

"Did you ask him about it?"

She nodded. "Yes, but he said it was just a new client whose identity he wanted to protect. That wasn't unusual. My father had a few high profile clients and anonymity was a big part of his business. He used to say you can't be a private investigator if you can't keep a secret."

"So you think something in that box you saw that day is important?" Mike wondered, trying to connect the dots.

"It came to me the other night in a dream."

"Another dream? About me?"

She shook her head. "Not this time. It was a dream about that day in my dad's office. One of the folders that was on his desk had the year 1983-1984 written on it."

"Those were the years I found you. The years you were in Hawkins."

"My father didn't have his PI practice until 1989. Why would he have files in his office from before that?"

"You think there's information about your past?"

She shrugged. "Maybe. Only..."

"Only what?"

"What if it was just a dream?"

"All of your other dreams weren't just dreams."

"I know, but it could be my subconscious playing tricks on me and maybe I saw something in my dream that wasn't really there."

"Yet you believed in yourself enough that you brought me out here."

"True," she said with a sigh. "I just hate to waste our time. I mean, the boxes aren't even labeled. Where do we even start?"

They both looked around at the large amount of boxes in front of them. There had to be at least one hundred of them.

Mike stepped forward and took a box off the top of one of the piles. He uncovered it and looked inside. He pulled out a file folder. Mike opened the folder and read the words from the first page.

"Juan Santos," he read. "Missing dog. August 7, 1990"

"It must be one of my father's case files," Jane explained as she opened a different box and grabbed another file folder. She opened the folder, and read the first page out loud. "Susan Adams. Missing son. February 22, 1991." She glanced over at Mike. "He must have saved them all. All of the paperwork from all of his cases."

"Then I guess we better get started."

"Wait..." she said, looking around. "This...this is impossible. There are dozens of boxes here and...and I don't even know if he kept any information about me at his office. I mean, we're following something that happened in my dream. This is crazy. It's a pin in a haystack. And we don't even know if there's a pin!"

"Needle," he corrected.

"What?" She asked, confused.

"The expression is a needle in a haystack," he told her.

"Oh." She sighed.

Mike wasn't sure if he should laugh or console her. He chose the latter.

"It's ok," he said, trying to raise her spirits. "We can do this."

"How do you know?"

"Because I believe in you. And because we're going to do this together." Mike smiled at Jane. "Ok?"

She looked at him and then over at the boxes. "I don't know how, but ok."

They had a momentous task in front of them, but Mike was willing to do anything to keep her with him. He was not going to lose her again.

Several hours later, Mike and Jane had opened, rummaged through, and subsequently moved dozens of boxes. They were more towards the middle of the storage unit now, with the boxes they had already gone through making a wall behind them. Thankfully neither of them were claustrophobic.

"This is impossible," Jane groaned, getting frustrated. It was hot and stuffy in the storage unit. Her forehead was beaded with sweat. Little dust particles from the boxes were sticking to her skin. One of them sneezed at least every five minutes from the dust getting into their noses. "We haven't found anything."

"We're not done," he reminded her.

"All we've found so far are hundreds of case files, mostly about women and their cheating husbands. It's depressing."

Mike opened the lid of another box. When he looked inside, he smiled. Mike reached his hand in and pulled out a bottle of whiskey.

"Maybe this will cheer you up," he said, holding it up for Jane to see.

"Care for a drink?"

She approached him with a small smile.

"This was my dad's favorite whiskey. I'm not surprised he kept some hidden at work," Jane said.

Mike shook the bottle, enticing her to have some. Jane nodded. They both sat down on boxes nearby. Mike pulled out two plastic cups from the box and put in a few ounces of the brown liquid into each cup. He handed Jane one of the cups.

"Cheers," he said, touching his cup to hers.

They each took a drink. Jane winced.

"I never was a fan of whiskey," she said, practically gagging. "It was the first drink I ever tried and I thought it was the most disgusting thing I ever tasted. But it didn't stop me from drinking half the bottle."

Mike laughed. "You drank half a bottle of whiskey?"

"I thought I was going to die the next day," she told him, giggling. "Worst hangover of my life."

"How old were you?"

"Seventeen."

"And you decided your first drink would be half a bottle of whiskey?"

"I was...rebellious."

"Was your dad strict?" Mike asked.

Jane shook her head. "Not particularly. But there was one incident... my dad...Hopper...whoever he was...he wouldn't let me have an internship with this social worker who came to our school sometimes. She knew I had an interest in social work so she kind of took me under her wing and let me shadow her a lot before going to college. She offered me a summer internship, but he wouldn't let me do it. He never really had a good reason. He told me it was because he wanted to spend time with me the summer before college, but he was always

working. I wonder now if he just didn't want me working for the government because of who I really was. Which is ironic because that's what I do now. I was so mad at him."

She took another sip of the whiskey, her eyes squinting.

"I don't think I've ever heard of someone getting that angry about missing out on an internship," Mike said with a laugh.

"I got so angry with him that I stole his whiskey from the liquor cabinet and put some in a big, metal water bottle. I started walking and I ended up a tattoo shop. I lied to the tattoo artist and told him I was eighteen. That's how I ended up with the tattoo on my ankle."

"So you were a rebel, huh?"

Jane shook her head. "No. That's the worst thing I ever did. And I felt so guilty about it, I told him the minute he came home."

"What did Hopper say?"

"He just hugged me. That's all. He didn't get angry or punish me or anything. But I could tell he was disappointed and that's what stuck with me."

"Did he ever ask about the tattoo? Why you chose to get that particular phrase?"

"No. Which, looking back, I guess is odd. It seems like there were a lot of signs that something was...off about my life, but I never put the puzzle together."

As Mike took another drink, his eyes glancing back to the box where he found the whiskey. He did a double take, put his cup down, and looked in the box more carefully. Mike pulled out a smaller, plain wooden box inside.

"I didn't notice this before," he said.

Mike handed it to Jane. As curious as he was about what was inside the box, he knew it was up to Jane to open it. She placed the box in her lap. It was only ten inches long and about six inches wide. It

wasn't tall enough to hold very much and it certainly wasn't wide or long enough to hold documents. But Jane knew exactly what it was.

"I made this for him," she told Mike, staring at the box in her lap. "My freshman year of high school I had to take a woodworking class. This was my final project."

"What's in it?"

Jane opened the lid of the box slowly. A tear came to her eye when she saw a photograph of her and her dad with the Golden Gate bridge behind them. She picked up the picture and handed it to Mike.

"I was sixteen in that picture," she told him.

"You look really happy."

"I was." She paused, looking through a handful of other photographs in the box. They were all of her and her dad. "But it was all a lie, wasn't it? Every one of these photographs is a lie."

"That's not true."

"He wasn't my dad!" Jane shouted, standing up. The box fell off her lap, clattering to the floor. Jane headed for the garage style door. She lifted it up and walked out into the night. Mike gathered up some of the photographs that had fallen to the ground. It was strange seeing Hopper again as an older man, but the photographs made Mike smile because in each and every one, Eleven looked happy.

"Hey, hey," he said, jogging to keep up with her brisk pace. He could see tears in her eyes.

"You don't get it," she said. "My whole life is a lie. All of it!"

"I know it's a lot, but your dad...Hopper. He wasn't a bad guy. He was the opposite actually."

"Then why did he lie to me?"

"To protect you. I know that's hard to hear, but it's true."

"He should have told me who I was. Where I came from. He should have told me about you and Hawkins and...and everything!"

"I don't disagree," Mike said. "But he had his reasons."

"I just feel like every happy memory I have of him is now tainted. Like all of this erases all of that."

"I don't think that's true," Mike said. "You know, my dad is a good guy. He worked hard, always made sure we had food on the table and nice things. He told us he loved us every once and a while and showed up at all the important moments like graduations and birthdays and things. But my dad never...did anything with us, you know. That was always my mom's job. I mean, I love him, but the man lacked in the quality time department. No dad is perfect, but it seems to me like yours tried to be."

Mike held out the photographs he was still holding to show Jane. She took them from him and looked at them.

"What if there's no proof in there of what he covered up? What if we're wasting all this time for nothing?"

"Any moment spent with you isn't wasted time."

She paused and then smiled. "You do realize how cheesy that sounded, right?"

He chuckled. "Yeah, I do, but I mean it. Come on, we're halfway through. Let's just go through a few more boxes. We'll find something. I know we will."

Jane sighed. "Ok."

They walked back towards the storage unit. Mike offered another shot of whiskey to Jane, but she turned him down. If she was going to find what they were looking for, she was going to do it with a clear head. Mike put the whiskey aside and dove into yet another box.

Author's Note: Sorry for the delay in posting. I've been so busy that I've barely had time to write and edit. I'll try to post the next chapter

soon!

13. Chapter 13

Chapter 13

An hour had passed and Jane and Mike were still in the storage unit where Jane had kept all of the things from Hopper's office. Mike had tried to remain hopeful that they would find something, but his hope was waning. He was tired, sweaty, and he just wanted to take Jane home and away from all of the pain she was feeling.

"Can I ask you something?" Jane asked from across the storage unit where she was elbow deep in a box.

"Sure."

"Why Margaret?"

"What?" Mike replied, confused not only as to what Jane meant, but also as to why she was bringing up Margaret. Even though he had only broken up with Margaret earlier that day, it felt like a lifetime ago. He wanted to move on with Jane. But, then again, maybe she couldn't move on until she got the answers she deserved.

"I mean, I get it," Jane continued. "She is beautiful and sophisticated and her father's rich, but what led you to her in the first place? You two seem so opposite."

"We are, but she wasn't always...the way she is now," Mike told her.

"I find that hard to believe," Jane said quietly.

"I met Margaret when I first started at Thompson's," Mike explained. "She was just finishing up her accounting degree from the University of California."

"She went to college?" Jane asked, surprised.

"Yeah. She's smart. I know it doesn't seem like it by looking at her now, but she has a head for numbers. She used to help out when Jeff first started the company. She helped with the accounting. As good at business as her father is, Jeff never was good at balancing the books.

He was always a lot better at spending money than he was at bringing money in. Without Margaret, I think the company would have floundered and gone under in its first year."

"I had no idea that she was so intelligent," Jane commented, suddenly feeling a little badly that she had judged the woman so harshly.

"After she graduated with an accounting degree, her father hired her full time. At first, for a couple years, she and I were friendly as any two colleagues would be. There was nothing...romantic between us or anything. She had a boyfriend actually. Some business guy she met in college. But then her father made millions when he sold his product to Microsoft and Margaret slowly began to change."

"How so?"

"First she dumped her boyfriend because he was working at a non-profit company that she didn't think was good enough for her or her reputation. Slowly she became high-maintenance and greedy and wanted everything handed to her. She stopped working for Thompson's and decided to just be a wealthy socialite instead."

"Then how'd you end up with her again?" Jane questioned.

"It was last year's gala actually. She showed up in a red dress with her perfectly done hair and nails and makeup."

"Every guy's fantasy," Jane muttered.

"I'm not proud of it, but I guess I fell under her spell," Mike continued. "We danced pretty much the whole night and by the end we were...dating. I honestly don't even remember how dancing turned into a relationship, but it did. When Margaret wants something, Margaret gets it. But she's not the only one to blame. I went along with it. I didn't say no. I think maybe I thought I could change her back into the woman she used to be. And when I realized I couldn't, it just became too complicated to break up with her and it was easier to stay together. Which, yes, I realize wasn't fair to either of us...or you."

"Are things really over with her?" Jane asked almost hesitantly. She

sounded like a scared kid.

Mike nodded profusely. "Absolutely. We're over. One hundred percent done. I just wished I had done it sooner. I should have broken up with her the night we met. Or at the very least, the night you left my apartment. The night we almost kissed."

"Why didn't you?" Jane asked.

"Will."

"Will? Your friend Will?"

"He called me that night after you left. I told him about you."

"You did? What did he say?"

"He was...surprised," Mike answered. "He questioned whether you really are Eleven, which made me question some things."

"Do you think I'm not her?"

"No!" Mike exclaimed. "I know you're her. Will just was trying to look out for me, but in doing so, he put some thoughts in my head. I should have just ignored it, but I couldn't help it. I had doubts."

"Do you still? Have doubts?"

Mike shook his head. "No. Especially not after I..." Mike stopped. He hadn't told Jane that he had visited Hopper's grave. Would she think it was weird? Would she be mad that he had gone to see her father?

"Not after you what?" Jane prompted.

"I went to see Hopper...your dad."

"You...what? My dad is...dead."

"I know. I went to visit his grave."

Jane furrowed her brow. "Why?"

"I think I just needed to talk to him," Mike explained. "To get some clarity."

"And did you get clarity?"

"Yes. I did. It sounds stupid, but..."

"But what?"

"He sent me a sign."

"A sign?" Jane questioned although there was no skepticism in her voice like Mike would have thought there would be. "What kind of sign?"

"Yeah, you're going to laugh, but it was a grocery store ad on my desk."

"You think a grocery store ad was a sign from my father?"

"Eggo's were on sale. Five boxes for eleven dollars." He paused, trying to gauge her reaction. "Eleven dollars. That's not a coincidence."

"And you think that was my dad telling you everything was going to be ok?"

Mike nodded. "I can't explain it, but I know it was him. I know he wanted me to see the truth."

"And what is the truth?" She asked, a little afraid of the answer.

"That you are Eleven. That everything is going to be ok. That you and I are meant to be."

Jane didn't respond at first. Mike watched her, but he couldn't see the emotions on her face. She was just dead pan. He didn't know whether she was going to cry or laugh or yell at him. He would have taken any of the three. What he couldn't take was the silence.

"Going to my dad's grave is good for clarity," she finally said. "There have been a lot of times since his death that he has helped me through hard times. I know that sounds crazy."

"It's not crazy," Mike assured her. "The woman there...Ruby. She told me you visited your dad every weekend."

Jane nodded. "I did. I do. Except..."

"Not this past weekend," Mike finished.

"How did you know that?"

"Ruby. Why didn't you go? Was it because of me?"

"Not because of you, really. I've just been...questioning everything about myself since meeting you. And I'm...angry with my dad. I want to yell at him and question him and..." she trailed off. "But I can't do that because he's not here. And that makes me angrier because I miss him."

"I'm sorry," Mike said.

"You have nothing to be sorry for. You aren't the one who took me away and erased my memory."

"I'm sorry for the loss of your father," Mike clarified. "No matter what the circumstances, losing a parent can't be easy."

"Thank you," she whispered. She looked around the storage unit. "It's late. Do you want to call it quits?"

Mike shook his head. "No. We're almost done. Let's finish what we started."

"Ok."

Nearly an hour later, as Mike moved one box to the "done" side of the storage unit, Jane shrieked.

"You ok?" He asked.

"I found it."

"Found what?"

She looked him in the eye.

"Proof."

Mike rushed over to where she was standing, bent over an open box. Inside were file folders, exactly the same as all of the other ones that Mike and Jane had gone through. Jane held up a single piece of lined paper with something handwritten on it.

"What is it?" Mike asked.

"A letter."

"To whom?"

She looked him in the eye. She had tears in her eyes. "To me. From my dad."

"What does it say?"

Jane began to read it out loud. "Dear Jane. Actually I shouldn't start that way. I should start by saying 'Dear El,' but that would just confuse you. Let me start by saying I love you more than any man could love his daughter. You need to know that the greatest thing in my life has been you. But there are things I've kept from you. Things you don't know about yourself. Your name isn't Jane Smith and my name isn't Raymond Smith. My name is Jim Hopper and your name is Eleven. Now before you start thinking that someone else is writing this, I'll prove to you that it's me. When you were fifteen I made us go camping. I said it was important for you to learn some outdoor skills. You were so angry with me for making you camp. That first night I started a fire so that we could make s'mores, but you wouldn't come out of the tent. That is until I accidentally lit the leg of my pants on fire. You came running out of the tent with your pink water bottle and put it out. Then you smirked at me and said 'who has the outdoor skills now?' We both laughed and then we packed everything up and stayed in a fancy hotel for the night."

"Is that a true story?" Mike interrupted.

"Yes. I never told that story to anyone. Only my dad would know."

"Keep reading," Mike prompted.

"So now that you believe me," Jane continued to read, "let me tell you who you really are. Your mother gave you the name Jane, but you

were taken from her and raised in a laboratory because you were special. They assigned you the number eleven and that became your name. You escaped as a young teenager and ended up involved in a crazy scenario that if I tried to explain it to you, you'd think I was crazy. So, I'll just say this. You came into my life in an unusual way, but I wouldn't change it for the world. But after a while, living a normal life was too dangerous. Bad people were looking for you and I knew that if I wanted you to be ok, we'd have to go into hiding. That's why you don't remember anything from before you were twelve. There was no car accident. I had your memory erased. It was the only way I knew to protect you. But I never meant to keep this from you for as long as I did. I never meant to lie. I did it all because I love you. I know you must have questions, but if you're reading this, that means I'm gone and I'm not there to answer your questions. But there is someone who can help you. There was a boy you were friends with before I even found you. His name is Mike Wheeler. I've been keeping tabs on him. Believe it or not, he lives in San Francisco. At the time of this letter, he was working for Thompson's Computer Company. I'm sure you can track him down. Trust him. Know that I love you and, no matter what, I'll always be your father. I love you Eleven."

Jane's voice cracked as she said those last words. She gently placed the letter back into the file folder it came from and put it back in the box. Mike watched her carefully. She was acting as if she was keeping it altogether, but he could tell by her face that she was ready to crack. Jane walked over to where Mike had put the bottle of whiskey. She unscrewed the top and placed the bottle to her lips. She took a long swallow.

"Jane..." Mike prompted.

She put her finger up, signaling for him to stop talking. She chugged the bottle again. The alcohol burned her throat as she drank more and more. Some of the brown liquid dribbled down the side of her mouth, but she didn't stop drinking. Mike watched as a significant amount of the drink disappeared from inside the bottle. A few seconds later, she finally put the bottle down, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand.

"That letter is dated on my 21st birthday," she said.

"He wanted you to know the truth," Mike replied.

"The truth hurts," she told him as a tear rolled down her cheek.

"I know. I'm sorry."

"There's no denying it now," she continued. "It's all true. Everything you've told me."

"But now you also know that your dad was trying to protect you. That he did everything for you."

"For me?" Jane scoffed. "It sounds like he did everything for himself! He took me away because he was scared! He never told me the truth because it was easier not to."

Jane pressed the bottle against her lips again. She drank some more before handing the bottle to Mike. As much as he wanted a drink, he knew one of them had to stay sober and it clearly wasn't going to be her. Jane went to put the bottle down on top of a closed box, but missed the top. The bottle fell over. Although it didn't break, alcohol began to spill from it. Mike went to pick it up, but Jane threw her arms around his neck. She kissed him hard on the mouth. Mike was so shocked it took him a split second to kiss her back. The kiss was sloppy and tasted like alcohol. She tugged at the bottom of Mike's shirt. It took all of his self-control to break their kiss and step back.

"Don't you want me?" She asked, her words slurred. She was already feeling the effects of the large amount of alcohol she drank.

"Yes, I do," he answered. "Very badly."

"Then take me. This is what my father wanted, wasn't it? For me to find you? For you to tell me the truth so that he didn't have to. He was a coward! But you're not, are you, Mike? You're not a coward."

"Your father wasn't a coward either."

She stepped towards him. Mike put an arm out to steady her as she wobbled.

"I want you too," she said. "We've been dancing around each other for weeks. Let's just do it already."

"Not like this," Mike stated. "It's late and you're upset and you're drunk and you don't know what you're doing."

"So you are a coward."

Jane slumped down on one of the boxes. She reached for the mostly spilled bottle of alcohol, but Mike grabbed it first and put it out of her reach.

"Let's get you home," he said quietly.

"I don't want to go home!" She shouted. "I want to see my father. I want to call him a coward to his face!"

"You're angry. And that's ok, but..." She reached for the bottle again, but Mike tucked it away behind some boxes. "Your father said something like that to me once."

Jane stopped reaching and looked at him, although her pupils were dilated and Mike knew her vision was probably blurry. She had consumed a large amount of hard alcohol in a very short amount of time.

"What?"

"I was angry with him when he kept you from me. And he told me it was ok to be angry. I think he'd want you to hear those same words."

Jane closed her eyes. Silent tears began to fall. "I want to go home," she whispered.

Mike nodded. "Then let's get you home."

Author's Note: Thanks for reading. I've been trying to write and post as fast as I can so thanks for sticking with me!

14. Chapter 14

Chapter 14

By the time Mike got Jane safely into the back a taxi, she was half asleep. Mike climbed in next to her and she immediately leaned her head on his shoulder. When the taxi driver asked for an address, Mike looked at Jane. He didn't know her address and she wasn't conscious enough to say hers out loud. Mike gave the driver his own address. The taxi driver took off.

With Jane asleep on his shoulder, Mike looked down at the file folder in his lap. He had taken the whole folder containing the letter that Hopper had left for Jane. There were other items in the folder that Jane hadn't gone through. Mike knew that Jane wouldn't want to leave it behind in storage. It was too important. It proved that everything Mike had told her was true. And it also proved that Hopper believed in him. So much so that it appeared as if Hopper had kept tabs on Mike as he grew up. It made Mike feel good that Hopper believed in him that much. Mike was supposed to be the beacon of hope for Eleven. It had always been that way and if Mike had his way, it would always stay that way.

When the taxi pulled up in front of Mike's apartment, Mike paid the driver, giving him a generous tip. He tucked the folder under his arm and helped Jane out of the taxi. Mike put her left arm around his shoulder and put his right arm around her waist so that he could help her walk towards the building. With it being so late, there thankfully weren't any people around who would question what he was doing with a girl that drunk.

Eventually Mike got Jane into the elevator and up to his apartment. With some difficulty he managed to get his keys out and open the door. Once inside, he picked Jane up bridal style. She wrapped her arms around his neck, nuzzling her face against his shoulder. She smelled amazing even though they had just spent hours in a dusty storage unit. Mike tried to brush the thought aside. He couldn't be thinking about how good she smelled. Mike brought Jane into the bedroom and gently placed her down in the middle of the bed. She rolled onto her side.

"Jane?" Mike whispered. She whimpered, but didn't open her eyes. Mike sat down on the bed beside her and put his hand on her shoulder. "Eleven?"

Her eyes opened slowly. She looked up at him, but wasn't entirely focused. Mike knew she was pretty drunk.

"Where are we?" She mumbled.

"At my apartment. Don't move. I'll be right back."

Mike went into the bathroom and grabbed a paper cup full of water and two Tylenol. He also took out an old, grey Hawkins t-shirt and a pair of sweatpants from his bureau before he returned to Jane.

"I feel safe here," Jane muttered, having curled herself into a little ball.

"You are safe here. Take these," he said, holding out the pills and cup of water. "They'll help you feel better."

Jane slowly uncurled herself. Mike helped her sit up. She took the pills from him and put them in her mouth. Mike tipped the water to her lips and helped her drink.

"You brought me clothes," Jane said, her words blending together, making her difficult to understand. She was staring at the t-shirt and sweatpants that Mike had placed on the bed as if they didn't belong there.

"Figured they'd be more comfortable. Think you can...ah...manage?"

Jane nodded. She reached for the bottom of her shirt, ready to pull it over her head.

"Woah, wait," Mike said. She looked at him innocently. It reminded Mike of the first day they had met. He had given her clean, warm clothes and she had almost stripped naked in front of Mike, Dustin, and Lucas. Back then the boys had been mortified. Now was a different story. Mike dreamed of seeing her naked. But not like this. Not when she was drunk and in need of someone to take care of her. "I'll be in the other room on the couch if you need anything, ok?"

"Ok," she replied.

"You sleep well."

Jane nodded. Mike left the cup with some water still inside on the bedside table. He stood up, went over to his bureau to grab a T-Shirt and some clean gym shorts for himself, and walked out of the room. Closing the bedroom door, Mike made his way to the living room. He quickly changed out of his clothes and into the more comfortable clothes he had grabbed from his room. He flopped down on the couch. He sighed, feeling like he needed a cold shower. It was very difficult to exercise self-control when the woman of his dreams was just on the other side of the wall in his bed, wearing his clothes. But Mike wasn't about to take advantage of the situation. If he was going to be with her, it was going to be when they both were completely sober and willing.

Just as Mike was about to turn on the TV, he heard his bedroom door opening. Mike looked up. The door was open, but Jane wasn't on the other side. Mike went to the doorway, wondering if maybe he hadn't closed it all the way and somehow it creaked open. When Mike looked into the room, Jane was sitting up in bed, resting against the headboard, her legs covered by the blankets. Even in the dark, Mike could see that she had blood under her nose. She had opened the door with her mind.

"You ok?" He asked, standing and approaching the door.

"Stay with me."

"I'll just be in the other room," he assured her.

"I want you here with me," she insisted, still sounding drunk. Somehow Mike knew, though, that she knew what she was saying and she meant it.

"Jane..."

"Please."

"I don't think that's a good idea," he told her. He leaned against the door jam. He was afraid to get any closer. He could feel his self-

control wavering. "You've had a lot to drink and..."

"This isn't about sex," she interrupted.

Mike was surprised by her bluntness.

"You should just sleep," he said.

"I know you're trying to be the good guy here. And I appreciate it. I'm sure I'll appreciate it even more when my head isn't swimming. Because you're right. I'm too drunk and...and emotional for sex right now. But I'm not too drunk to know that I don't want to be alone."

"You're not alone."

"Then stay. Stay with me."

Mike knew he wouldn't say no. If she wanted him with her, he would be with her. After all, it was what he wanted too. So he nodded. Mike walked slowly over to the bed. She watched him as he climbed in beside her. When his head finally rested on the pillow, Jane scooted closer to him, resting her head on his chest. Mike's arm instinctually went around her. She started to cry.

"It's ok," he told her. "It's all going to be ok."

"Thank you," she whispered after a few moments of silence.

"For what?"

"For being you."

As she said it, she closed her eyes. Mike held her as her tears subsided and her body started to breathe evenly. It wasn't until he was sure she was asleep that he finally closed his eyes and let sleep take him.

The next morning Mike awoke slowly. He opened his eyes, expecting to see Jane beside him, but she wasn't there. Instead he saw a folded piece of paper on the pillow beside him. Mike took the paper and flopped down on his back. Holding it above his head, Mike read it.

Thank you for everything. I'm sorry I had to go, but one of us still has a job. Meet me tonight and I promise I won't be too drunk or emotional.

"Meet you where?" Mike said out loud and then cursed himself that he still didn't even have her cell phone number. As he concocted a plan to meet her at her office building when she got out of work, there was a knock on his apartment door. Mike scrambled out of bed with a smile on his face. As he jogged towards the front door in bare feet, he put the note Jane had left him on the kitchen counter. Running his hand through his hair, Mike flung the door open.

"Couldn't wait until tonight, huh?" He said before he actually saw who was on the other side of the door. He expected it to be Jane, but it wasn't.

"Expecting somebody else?" Margaret huffed, pushing past him. Surprisingly, she wasn't in a fancy dress with matching heels. Instead she had on a pair of form-fitting, black workout pants and a pink zip-up hoodie over a black tank top. Even her hair wasn't done up. It was pulled back into a messy ponytail. But of course she had lipstick and mascara on. Mike had never known her to leave the house without makeup on.

"Actually yes," Mike answered. "I was expecting someone else." He left the door open a moment, hoping she would just walk out again, but she didn't. Instead, she stormed into his apartment, standing with her hands on her hips in the middle of his living room.

"Who is she?" Margaret demanded.

Mike closed the door. He approached Margaret, but was sure to keep his distance.

"What are you doing here?"

"Is it that plain, unkept woman? Jane?"

"She's not plain or unkept," Mike insisted, suddenly feeling very protective over Jane. "And it's none of your business. We broke up."

"Oh no. I don't get broken up with."

"Well, I'm sorry, but..."

"I can't believe you think you can leave me for her!" Margaret shouted.

"I need coffee," Mike muttered. He sauntered off into the kitchen. Mike took a canister of coffee out of the cupboard and began preparing the coffee pot.

"Don't walk away from me!" Margaret exclaimed, following him.

"I don't know what you want me to say, Margaret. It's over. We're over. I think I made that pretty clear yesterday."

"And you think you can just get away with cheating on me?"

"I didn't cheat on you," Mike replied.

"And yet you were expecting Jane at your door this morning? Was she here last night? Did you sleep with her?"

"Again, that's none of your business."

"Were you with her while I was away? While I was traveling?"

"No."

"But you lied to me about her. You said you were doing consulting work for her."

"I shouldn't have lied," Mike admitted and he meant it. Margaret was a lot of things, but she wasn't someone who deserved to be lied to.

"And I'm sorry about that. Jane was someone I knew when I was younger."

"She's the girl in that picture," Margaret stated. "That stupid dance."

"Yes. We...lost touch for a long time. We reconnected recently."

"Reconnected? Is that what they're calling it these days?"

"Nothing happened between Jane and I when you and I were together."

"Do you really want someone like her when you could have someone like me?"

Mike didn't even have to stop to think. "Yes."

"You're making the biggest mistake of your life."

"Look, Margaret, like I said yesterday, I'm sorry that things didn't work out between us. And I'm sorry that I didn't tell you about Jane from the beginning. And I'm sorry that I hurt you. That was never my intention. But I think even you can admit that we weren't right together."

"Any man would be lucky to have me."

"That's true. But I'm not the right man for you. You'll find him. I have no doubt about that."

"Nobody has ever broken up with me," she stated, anger still in her voice.

Mike sighed. He wasn't getting through to her. He was sorry that he had hurt her, but there wasn't anything he could do to change that now. She just needed to move on. Mike was sure that she was more upset about being broken up with than the fact that she and Mike were no longer together. She never really loved him just as he had never really loved her.

"I've said all I need to say," Mike said. "You should go."

"Fine. And by the way, your coffee sucks."

Mike looked at the coffee pot as if Margaret had hurt its feelings. When he turned around again, she was gone. Although he didn't notice it at the time, the note that Jane had left him, the note that he had left on the kitchen counter was gone too.

Author's Note: I know people were hoping for more "Mileven" time, but you're just going to have to wait. Thanks for sticking with me!

15. Chapter 15

Chapter 15

Mike took his time getting ready that morning. After his run-in with Margaret, he drank three cups of coffee. He usually stopped at one or at the most two, but he felt this need to prove that his coffee didn't suck. Even though Margaret preferred expensive coffee beverages from fancy cafes around the world, Mike was content with the coffee grounds that came in a large, plastic can that he could toss into a filter and let his coffee pot do the rest.

After his coffee, Mike took a shower and changed into a pair of Jeans and a dark blue polo shirt. He noticed that Jane had left the clothes he had let her sleep in neatly folded on the table next to the bed. Mike was pretty sure he would never be able to look at that T-Shirt again without thinking of her. That, of course, made him think about the note Jane had left. Where did she want to meet him after work? Mike made his way back into the kitchen to get the note she had left, but it wasn't on the counter. He looked around on the floor, but it wasn't there either. He wondered if he had left it in the living room so he looked there as well as the bedroom, but it was nowhere to be found.

"Strange," Mike muttered to himself.

Shrugging, Mike decided to just go with plan b, which was basically no plan at all. With no job to go to, he decided he would spend the day in beautiful San Francisco and then meet her at her office at the end of the work day. From there he would take her on a proper date and hope that they would end up back at his place where she wouldn't need anything to sleep in at all.

Shoving his keys into one pocket and his wallet into another, Mike left the apartment. He took the elevator down to the first floor, smiled at the doorman, and walked out onto the sidewalk. The day was a little overcast, but Mike didn't care. It was going to be the perfect day.

By noon, Mike found himself sitting in the same seat at the same deli

outside of Jane's office that he had been at the day before. Even though he had been there less than twenty-four hours earlier, it felt like a lifetime ago. So much had transpired in that day that Mike felt like a new man. He stared out the window, his eyes focused on the building Jane worked in. The sun had come out, burning off the grey clouds. It was a beautiful day.

"So, are you back to find that girl of yours?" The man behind the counter asked. He was the same man who Mike had told his story to the day before.

"I found her," Mike replied.

"And?" The man prompted.

"And I think...I think I'm going to buy her some lunch."

Mike hadn't really thought of a plan as he was out enjoying San Francisco. He hadn't really meant to end up on the same street as where she worked. He hadn't meant to go to the same deli. Or had he? Had his subconscious taken him there because that's where he really wanted to go?

By the time he realized he was opening the door to the deli, he knew he had to see her soon. After all, waiting until after work seemed much too far away. And he hated that he didn't just have her phone number so that he could call her to tell her he was thinking about her. The first thing he needed to do was to get her number. Well, maybe that would be the second thing he would do. The first thing he would do when he saw her would be to kiss her like she had never been kissed before.

"What can I get for you?" The man behind the counter asked, ready to write down Mike's order on a small notepad.

Before Mike could answer, his cell phone started chirping from his pocket. He was a little surprised. Most of the calls he received on his cell phone had always been about work. Without a job, he was surprised anyone was calling him at all in the middle of the day. Mike didn't recognize the number, but he flipped open the phone and held it to his ear.

"Hello?" He said.

"Hi," came the reply.

Mike smiled. He would know her voice anywhere.

"I thought you were working," he said sarcastically.

"I was," Jane answered. "I am. I just...it's lunchtime and I..."

"You what?" He prompted.

"I was thinking about you."

Mike laughed. "You missed me, huh?"

She chuckled. "Maybe."

"Well, think you can get away for a while?" Mike asked.

"I'm kind of swamped actually," she replied with a hint of sadness.

"I'm always swamped. I usually only take a short lunch."

"Well, then it's a good thing that I'm right across the street."

"You...what?" She asked surprised.

"I'm across the street. At the deli. Can you meet me? Even if just for a few minutes?"

She laughed. "I'll be right there."

Mike hung up the phone, but before he put it away, he was sure to store the phone number she called him from in his contacts list. Now that he could check that off his list, the next thing he needed to do was kiss her.

A minute later, he watched Jane walk out of the building and towards the deli. He held the door open for her and took her hand the moment she walked in.

"Hi," he said.

"Hi," she responded. "I really do only have a few minutes."

"Then we better make them count."

They went up to the counter and each ordered a turkey sandwich and iced tea. The owner gave Mike a smile and told them he'd bring their orders to them when he was done.

Mike led Jane to a back corner booth. Even though there were only a few other people in the deli, Mike wanted them to have as much privacy as possible. He pulled her closer to him. He could see the surprise and excitement in her eyes. That was all the permission he needed. He leaned in and kissed her. His lips moved against hers slowly and then with more vigor. It wasn't like the drunken kiss of the night before where it was sloppy and wet and she tasted like alcohol. And it wasn't like the two simple, childhood kisses they had shared as young teenagers. This was something else entirely. This was fireworks and heaven and the best feeling Mike had ever had.

"Wow," Jane said when they parted.

"Yeah, wow."

They both sat on the same side of the booth, their bodies turned so they were facing each other. Jane's cheeks were flushed. Clearly she had the same reaction to the kiss that he had.

"I can't believe you're...here," Jane said.

"I'm sorry," he apologized, suddenly realizing that showing up outside of her work was a bit presumptuous. "It's not too much, is it? I just couldn't wait for tonight."

"No. I'm glad you're here."

"Me too."

"I'm sorry about leaving this morning."

"Yeah, why'd you run out on me?" Mike asked.

"I didn't want to wake you. You looked...peaceful."

"You could have woken me."

"Yeah, well, I also had that glamorous morning after getting drunk glow, so..."

He laughed again. "I'm sure you were beautiful. How are you feeling by the way? You must have some hangover."

"I'm down to a dull headache thankfully," Jane answered. "Some Tylenol, lots of water, and a few coffees have done me good this morning."

"Do you get your coffee from a plastic container?" Mike asked.

Jane didn't answer right away. Mike knew it was an odd question.

"Yes," she finally said. "Why?"

"Just making sure," Mike replied.

"Ok. Is that important?"

"No. Of course not. I was just wondering," Mike answered even though it was kind of important to him. It was just another thing that made Jane so different from Margaret. It was another thing for him to love about her.

"Did you get the note I left you?" Jane questioned.

"Yeah. There's only one problem."

"Are you busy tonight?" She asked, disappointment in her voice.

"No. And even if I were, I would have cancelled those plans immediately. I just didn't know where to meet you tonight. You didn't put that in your note."

"I left my address on the back," she told him.

"Oh. I didn't think to flip it over."

"Well, it's there. I figured it's about time you saw where I lived. After all, I think it's safe to say you're not a murderer."

He chuckled. "Unfortunately...I can't seem to find the note."

"Oh."

"I have no idea what happened to it. It must have fallen under a piece of furniture or something. But I can put the address right into my phone," Mike said, taking out his cell phone and pulling open the phone number he had just saved under Jane's name. She gave him the address and he typed it in.

"So...since you are a man with no responsibilities these days, what did you do all morning?" She asked.

Mike thought about telling her about Margaret, but decided to keep his encounter to himself. He didn't want anything to spoil the few minutes they had together.

"I spent most of the morning in Golden Gate Park, just enjoying this beautiful day."

"Ok I'm officially jealous," she said. "You get to be outdoors in the sunshine and I've been stuck in my office all morning."

"Well, pretty soon we'll just have to take a day off together, now won't we?"

She nodded. "I like the sound of that."

The owner approached with their sandwiches and drinks. He placed them on the table and both Mike and Jane thanked him.

"You know I...ah...I had another dream about us last night," Jane said, taking a bite of the sandwich.

"Oh? What kind of dream?" He asked flirtatiously.

"Not that kind of dream," she assured him. "We were kids. Maybe it's another memory?"

"What was it about?"

"I was walking through a school. Looked like a middle school maybe. I was standing at a door, looking at you through a window pane. You were in a gym. There was a girl skateboarding around you with red hair."

"Max," Mike told her.

"So it is a memory?"

"Yeah. Max was a friend. You didn't know her. She moved to Hawkins after you had disappeared."

"I think I...I think I did something to her. Something not very nice. The dream was a little unclear, but..."

"You pulled her off her skateboard. You were...jealous I think because I was spending time with her."

"Something else happened in my dream," she continued. "The gym turned into what looked like a basement. You were there in a tent made of blankets. You were talking into a radio, calling my name. I was right there next to you, but I couldn't...I couldn't get to you. I yelled your name and you couldn't hear me. I tried to reach out to you, but it was like grasping at air. It was so...weird."

"I think maybe that's what it was like for you when you went into your trance. You could see things, but not interact with them."

"I didn't like that feeling."

"It must have been awful," Mike said. "I'm sorry."

"Let's talk about something else. Whatever happened to Max? Are you still friends?"

"No. She moved away after our freshman year of high school. She and Lucas dated for a few months before they decided they were better off as just friends. After she moved, they stayed in touch for a little while, but eventually we all lost touch."

"That's too bad."

"Yeah."

"You should call them," Jane suggested.

"Who?"

"Dustin and Lucas and Will. Take it from someone who never really

had friends. You need to do what you can to keep them in your life. Don't let so much time go by."

"You have friends," Mike assured her. "Dustin, Lucas, and Will are your friends too."

"Well, maybe someday I can see them again."

"Oh you will because trust me they won't believe me until they actually see you in person. You know, we get together every summer. We made a pact that we'd always meet up in Hawkins at least once a year. This year it's for 4th of July. We're meeting at Lucas's bar. Usually we have a no significant others rule, but I think we can make an exception since you're not just a significant other."

"So is that what I am? Your significant other?"

"Is that what you want to be?"

"I..." Jane was cut off by a buzzing sound. She dug into her pocket and pulled out her cell phone. "I'm sorry, I have to take this."

"It's ok."

Jane pressed the phone to her ear. "Hey Sheila, what's going on?" Mike could hear a woman's voice on the other end of the phone. He thought he heard the words 'meeting' and 'important.'

"Ok, I'll be right there," Jane said into the phone.

"Everything ok?" Mike asked once she had hung up.

"Apparently our boss has called an emergency meeting," Jane explained.

"That doesn't sound good."

She shrugged. "It's budget season so odds are their slashing ours again. Anyway, I'm sorry, but I have to go," Jane said.

"Ok. I'll see you tonight?"

"I wouldn't miss it."

Jane slid out of the booth, as did Mike. Before she turned to leave, Mike pulled her in for another kiss. It wasn't as long as the first, but it was just as good.

"Bye Jane," he said.

"Hey Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you think...do you think you could call me Eleven? El for short?"

Mike smiled. "Yeah. I think I can do that."

"Ok. Goodbye Mike."

"Goodbye El."

Mike watched her go. He couldn't wipe the smile off his face.

Author's Note: Sorry for the delay, but this chapter ended up having some major re-writes from what I thought it was going to be. Originally, Mike and Eleven were supposed to just have a cute and flirty phone call, but I figured it I didn't give everyone a non-drunk kiss soon, I'd have a mutiny on my hands. Ha ha. Anyway, thanks for reading and I'll try to post the next chapter soon!

16. Chapter 16

Chapter 16

As Mike watched Eleven walk back into her office building from the deli, his cell phone rang. He looked at the caller ID and chuckled. When he had stored Eleven's phone number into his phone, he had put her in under the name 'Eleven.' That was before she had even asked him to call her that, but that's how Mike always thought of her. And now that's how she thought of herself, which made Mike immensely happy.

"Hello, Eleven," he answered the phone.

"I like hearing you call me that.

"I like calling you that. I'm a little surprised to hear from you so soon though," he teased. "You really can't get enough of me, can you?"

She laughed. "I just missed you so much in these last thirty seconds," she replied sarcastically.

"Ha ha."

"Actually, I realized that we didn't set a time for our date tonight," she said.

"I guess we didn't."

"I get out around 6. Does 7 work for you?"

"I'd meet you anytime, anywhere."

"You're a dork," she replied flirtatiously.

"I know. Do you want me to meet you here? I can pick you up after work."

"Better not. I'd like to...put on something nice for you."

He had to bite his lip to keep from groaning. "I like the sound of

that," he said.

"Then I'll see you at 7 at my place."

"Can I bring anything?"

"Just your cute self."

"You think I'm cute?" He asked. He could almost see her rolling her eyes and smiling at the same time.

"I'll see you then."

"And Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"Don't lose my address this time."

Before Mike could respond, Eleven hung up the phone. Mike had half a mind to walk into her office building and drag her out of there so he could have his way with her, but he knew that was just a fantasy. He was going to have to wait even if it killed him.

Mike finished his sandwich at the deli and then headed to the Ferry Market, an indoor shopping center that had sold a lot of local goods. From food to flowers to souvenirs for the tourists, it had everything anyone could need all in one beautiful historic building. Mike took his time walking around from vendor to vendor. He tasted a few different chocolate places before he picked up a box of freshly made, gourmet truffles from a local chocolatier. Then he picked out a bottle of white wine and picked up a bouquet of a dozen red roses. He wanted his night with Eleven to be as romantic and as perfect as possible.

When he got back to his apartment, Mike hopped in the shower and then stood in front of his closet with a towel around his waist, staring at his clothes. He mostly owned button down shirts, polo shirts, and suit jackets with matching pants. His work required him to look a certain way and of course Margaret always expected him to be dressed up whenever they went out. He never got to just go out in Jeans and a T-shirt. Mike wanted to impress Eleven, but he also

wanted to be himself.

After pushing aside almost every piece of clothing in his closet, Mike eventually picked out a solid, light grey shirt with a black button down over it. He pulled on a pair of comfortable, yet nice looking Jeans and looked at himself in the mirror. He looked pretty good. He hoped Eleven thought so too.

Staring at himself, Mike was brought back to his childhood. He saw himself as the twelve year old boy he had been when he had first met Eleven. With his shaggy hair always just a little messy and his brightly colored striped polo shirts, Mike had been a cute kid, but certainly never an extremely attractive boy that the girls fought over. He had grown up, though, into a handsome man and he had had his fair of female attention from college onward. But there was only one female Mike had any intention of impressing.

Feeling satisfied with how he looked, Mike made his way into the living room. He looked around, his eyes landing on the clock on the wall. It was only a little past five. He had a little over an hour to go until he saw Eleven again. Looking around the room, Mike tried to think of what to do with himself for that hour. He had an unread PC World magazine sitting on the coffee table in the living room, but Mike didn't really care about the newest inventions in the world of technology. He could try something on TV, but except for the news, there never was anything on during the five o'clock hour. He thought about unpacking some more of the boxes that he kept in his spare bedroom, but he didn't want to get dirty and sweaty before going out to meet Eleven. Lastly he thought about how he should be looking for a new job. He should grab the newspaper and start scouring the help wanted section, but Mike wasn't in the mood.

As he stared at the television remote, debating on whether he really was going to watch the news after all, Mike's house phone rang. He looked at the caller ID. It was Will. Will had called a dozen times since he and Mike had their argument on the phone about whether Jane really was Eleven. Despite all of Will's attempts to contact Mike in the few days since then, Mike hadn't called him back. Taking a deep breath, Mike knew it was time.

"Hello," he said, answering the phone.

"Hey, Mike. I'm glad you picked it up," Will said on the other end. "I didn't think you would."

"Yeah, sorry about that."

"No, I'm the one who should be sorry. I'm sorry if I made you upset when you told me about finding Eleven. I shouldn't have doubted you. But I was just looking out for you."

"I know," Mike replied. Even though he had been angry with Will for questioning Eleven's legitimacy, deep down inside Mike knew that Will was just doing what he thought was best for Mike. He was being the good friend that he had always been.

"You ok?" Will asked.

"Yeah...I am."

"How's Eleven?"

"So do you believe me that it's her now?" Mike questioned, really wanting to hear Will's answer.

There was a pause.

"I believe you," Will finally said. "If you say that it's her than I believe you. After all, you always knew her best."

Mike smiled. "Thanks, Will. Did you tell Dustin and Lucas about her?"

"Yes," Will admitted. "Don't be angry. I wanted to get their opinion."

"I'm not angry," Mike assured him. "What was their opinion?"

"Dustin was pissed that you didn't call him first," Will told him. Mike laughed. "Lucas was a little concerned like I was, but I think they're both excited that she's back. Dustin wanted to call you the instant I told him, but I said you needed your space and that you were figuring things out and didn't need us meddling."

"Thanks."

"Of course, Dustin is expecting a phone call any day now. He has a lot of questions."

"I'm sure he does," Mike said with a laugh. He could picture Dustin with a handwritten list of questions that he wanted to ask Eleven like an interrogation. Even as an adult, Dustin was always curious about everything. Lucas, on the other hand, would most likely just stare at Eleven quietly for a few minutes, contemplating his next move. He, like Will, would most likely question Eleven's motives in coming back into Mike's life. After all, Lucas was always the one who wasn't sure about Eleven from the beginning. Lucas and Dustin were so different from each other, yet still the best of friends.

"So...when do we get to see her?" Will asked.

"I'd like to bring her to Lucas's bar on the fourth of July," Mike told him.

"I think that's a good idea. Let all of us catch up."

"And you can see for yourself that she is Eleven."

"I told you, I believe you."

"Thanks," Mike said. That means a lot."

"So...are you two...together?"

Mike chuckled. "I guess you could say that."

"What does that mean?"

"Well, we do have a date tonight."

"A date, huh?" Will teased. "It's crazy to think about you and El finally going on a date. Wait...what about Margaret?"

"Oh, right. I broke up with Margaret."

"I'm not surprised. How did that go? Was Jeff pissed?"

"He...ah...fired me."

"What?" Will exclaimed.

"But it's ok. I was done with Thompson's anyway."

"Done with them? I thought you liked working there."

"I thought I did too."

"So...you just let Margaret's dad fire you because you broke up with Margaret. I don't think legally he can do that."

"It doesn't matter. I quit," Mike stated. He was wondering when the fact that he had quit his job would hit him. He didn't know if he would come to regret his decision. But he didn't regret it. Not one bit. He was thrilled with his decision.

"You quit your job? Seriously?"

"Yup."

"What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know, but...I'm happy. I'm happier than I've been in a long time. I don't think I realized how unhappy I was until Eleven came back into my life."

"I guess that means you and Eleven are definitely together," Will surmised.

"Well, it's not like I've officially asked her to be my girlfriend, but yeah, we're together. She's...amazing. She's smart and caring and beautiful. And I know it sounds corny, but she's...right for me. I feel like a different person when I'm with her, a better person. She's it for me."

"I'm glad you're happy," Will said. "I mean that."

"Thanks, Will."

As they continued their conversation about a new set of illustrations Will was working on and about news from Hawkins, Mike sat back against the couch contently. Things in his life were definitely looking up.

At 6:30, Mike found himself sitting in the back of a taxi. He looked down at his cell phone and read the address that Eleven had told him. He told the address to the driver and then sat back as the car took off. The driver told him it would be about twenty minutes. That gave Mike plenty of time to get to Eleven's apartment on time.

"Must be a special lady," the driver said, looking in the rearview mirror to catch Mike's eye. Mike knew that the wine, the chocolates, and the flowers he had with him in the backseat might look like overkill, but he had every intention of spoiling Eleven. And he was going to start immediately. After all, he had a lot of lost time to make up for.

"She is special," Mike replied. "Very special."

The rest of the car ride was silent as the driver wove in and out of traffic. As promised, the journey took just about twenty minutes. When the driver stopped, it was not in the nicest part of town. It was actually just outside the city limits of San Francisco, where Mike guessed rent was cheaper. Mike got out of the car, carrying the flowers, chocolates, and wine with him and looked up at the apartment building in front of him. It was certainly one of the older buildings in the area. It was a white stone building with fire escapes coming from every window above the first floor. Mike wondered which window was Eleven's.

"Good luck!" The taxi driver called as he sped away. Mike smiled. He felt like he didn't need any more luck. The luck was in finding Eleven in the first place.

Mike approached the front door. He was happy to see that the door was locked and that in order to gain entrance, he would have to ring Eleven's doorbell and have her buzz him in. Although he knew that Eleven could take care of herself, it made the large apartment building seem a little more safe. Mike found the doorbell marked 4D and pressed it. He waited, but nothing happened. He waited a few moments and then buzzed again. For the second time, there was no response. Mike knew he was early, but he wasn't that early. He wondered if she had gotten stuck at work. After all, she did say she had to work late. As Mike was about to pull out his phone to call her, an older man came out of the door. Mike managed to grab the door

before it closed. So much for security, he thought.

Mike walked into the apartment building and found himself in a small foyer with two doors. He pushed one open and saw a long hallway with doors on both side. The doors were numbered and all had the letter A next to them. Mike guessed that all of the apartments on the first floor were marked with an A. That meant Eleven's apartment was most likely on the fourth floor. Going back into the foyer where he first started, Mike opened the door that he hadn't opened the first time. He saw a staircase. He started climbing, not stopping until he got to the fourth floor. When he emerged from the staircase on the fourth floor, Mike took a moment to catch his breath. He wasn't out of shape, but four flights was a lot. Finally, buzzing with anticipation, Mike walked into the hallway. It was the same as the first floor. He walked three doors down and found 4D. As Mike went to knock, he noticed the door wasn't closed all the way, which seemed strange. Had she left the door open because she was waiting for him?

"El?" He called out, knocking. As he did so, the door opened slightly. Mike wondered if somehow he had missed her. Was there an elevator that she took down to let him in and she had left the door open for the few minutes she would be gone? Mike opened the door a little more and looked into the apartment. Immediately he knew that something wasn't right.

Author's Note: I just love a cliffhanger! Anyway, I have to admit that I struggled with this chapter a bit. I worked on it a lot because I felt like it was dragging quite a bit for a while, but I also needed certain things to happen in this chapter to further the story along. I hope you liked it (especially the ending...ha ha). As for the next chapter - I am currently dog-sitting 2 dogs (as well as taking care of my own pup) so I won't have much time for writing this week. I will post the next chapter as soon as I can, but it might be a little while. Sorry in advance! Thanks for reading and don't forget to review!

17. Chapter 17

Chapter 17

Mike had to remind himself to take a breath. As he stood in the doorway to Eleven's apartment, he felt like someone had punched him hard in the stomach. He tried to calm down before he started to hyperventilate as he took in the scene in front of him.

There were papers and photographs and books on the floor and on the couches in the living room strewn all over the place as if someone had just absentmindedly thrown them around like confetti. Mike took a few steps into the apartment, still having to tell himself to breathe in and out. From the moment he had seen that the door was open, an awful feeling had taken over him. Something was horrible wrong.

Mike took a few more steps in, trying to figure out the layout of the apartment. He could see the door to what looked like Eleven's bedroom. From afar he could see that clothes were all over the place on the bed and on the floor.

"Eleven?" Mike shouted, placing the chocolate and flowers and wine on the kitchen table. Mike walked around the small apartment. The living room was barely big enough for the sofa and small TV she had there. The kitchen was even smaller with just the basic necessities, including a regular old "make your own" coffee pot. Mike poked his head into the bedroom and saw that at least that was bigger. Every room, however, was ransacked.

Mike's heart dropped. The dread he felt grew in intensity. What was going on? Where was El?

"Who are you?" A male voice said from behind Mike. He nearly jumped out of his skin, the noise startling him. Mike turned around and saw a man standing in the open doorway with a tool belt around his waist. From his tan work boots to his blue button down shirt with the name Stan embroidered over his heart, Mike assumed he was a maintenance worker for the apartment building.

"Is this Jane Smith's apartment?" Mike asked. He was hoping that

maybe he had the wrong apartment. Maybe this was someone else's place. Maybe Eleven was safe and sound on a different floor just waiting for him to arrive.

"And who are you?" Stan asked.

"I'm...I'm her boyfriend," he answered.

"I didn't know Jane had a boyfriend."

"So this is her place?" Mike repeated.

"It was."

"What do you mean was?"

"Sorry to tell you, man, but your girl is gone."

"What are you talking about? Where did she go?"

Stan shrugged. "I came up earlier to fix a leaky sink a few doors down in 4F and saw her packing like a mad woman."

"Packing?"

"Yup. She took two suitcases of clothes and some other things and was out of here in less than ten minutes."

"Did she say anything?"

Stan shook his head. "Nope, but not an hour later, when I was working on that sink, I heard some commotion going on out here. I poked my head out and saw two cops banging on her door."

"Police officers?" Mike asked, panicked. "Did they say what they were doing there?"

"I heard words like 'money laundering' and 'fake identity' being thrown around. There were even a couple of guys in suits here. Looked like detectives or maybe even the feds. They looked around for a few minutes and when they saw your girl wasn't here, they split. Hey, what was your girlfriend up to?"

"Nothing," Mike said, looking around the apartment. Everything Stan said was crazy, and yet his story fit. Eleven was gone. Her apartment looked like someone had come through it in a hurry. But why?

"She must have been doing something wrong," Stan continued. "They don't send out men in suits for nothing."

"It was a mistake," Mike insisted, feeling like he needed to protect her.

"Well, she sure left in a hurry."

"And you're sure she didn't...say anything?"

"Nope. Sorry."

"Thanks."

Stan walked away, leaving Mike alone. Mike didn't know what to do or what to think. What could have happened? If the cops thought Eleven was involved in some kind of money laundering, they were wrong. He knew Eleven would never do anything like that. She cared too much about her job and the kids she was trying to help. Why had she run? What was going on?

Mike pulled his cell phone out of his pocket. He took the phone number she had texted him from and dialed it. The phone didn't even ring before a computerized voice spoke.

"We're sorry, but the number you dialed has been disconnected," the voice said.

Mike wanted to throw his phone across the room, but he had to remind himself to be calm. Panicking wasn't going to make anything better. He pulled up Jane's work number and dialed it. It rang a few times before an answering machine picked up.

"You've reached Jane Smith at the Human Services Agency. Please leave me a message and I'll get back to you during normal business hours."

Mike didn't leave a message. He shoved his phone back in his pocket

and went searching around the apartment. There had to be some clue as to where she was or what was going on. She wouldn't just leave without telling him. Unless Will had been right. Was she really Eleven or had Mike just wanted so badly to find her that he had made up his mind that it was really her? Had she been playing him? If so, what was her end game? To break his heart?

Mike shook his head, banning the thought. He knew she was Eleven. She had opened a door and dented a can with her mind. She had the letter they found from Hopper in the storage unit and that tattoo on her ankle and she had Eleven's eyes and Eleven's lips. Mike knew without a doubt that it was her. And he also knew that she didn't have a mean bone in her body.

"Where are you?" Mike asked out loud.

He made his way into the bedroom. That was when he noticed that even amongst all the chaos of the discarded clothes and the empty hangers strewn about, there was something that wasn't just thrown around. On the bed, on top of a cream colored comforter, was a red, strapless dress. It wasn't crumpled into a ball like some of the other clothes or haphazardly tossed. It had been laid out. It was perfectly wrinkle free and looked as if it were waiting for someone to put it on. Resting just above the dress, leaning against the pillows was an envelope. Mike reached for it with shaky hands. Something definitely wasn't right. Too much of what he was seeing reminded him of when he had first found out Eleven was gone fifteen years earlier. He had gone to Hopper's cabin and found the place empty except for a picture he found under the bed. Mike opened the envelope, having some idea already of what was inside. He pulled out the photograph of him and Eleven at the Snowball dance. Something told him to flip it over so he did. On the back were the words 'Friends Do Lie.' Whatever had happened, Eleven blamed him.

Mike sat on the edge of the bed, staring at the words Eleven had written. What could have happened in the few hours since Mike had last seen her? Why was she being investigated for money laundering? Why would she think Mike had anything to do with it? He flipped the photograph over and gazed at their young faces. The day of the Snowball had been the happiest day in Mike's young life. He didn't know then what a huge impact Eleven would have on him. But he did

know now that he couldn't just sit around and lose her again.

Mike stood up, tucking the photograph under his arm. He walked back through the apartment building. He glanced over at the chocolates, wine, and flowers he had bought. They didn't matter now. All that mattered was getting Eleven back and Mike knew who might be able to help him do that.

Leaving Eleven's apartment, Mike made his way back down to the bottom level. He called for another taxi and waited outside. Pacing the sidewalk, a million thoughts went through his mind. Did she really think he had anything to do with whatever had happened? Did she hate him? Would she come back? As Mike pondered the last question, the taxi pulled up. It was the same driver who had brought him to Eleven's apartment.

"What happened?" The taxi driver asked.

"Just drive," Mike muttered, sliding into the back of the taxi.

"Will do. Where are we headed?"

Mike gave the man his address, the same location he had been picked up at originally. Although it took basically the same amount of time to get back to Mike's house as it did to get to Eleven's apartment, Mike felt like it took an eternity. As soon as the taxi even slowed down in front of his apartment complex, Mike opened the door and jumped out. He paid the taxi driver, not caring that he gave him a very large tip. He practically ran into the building. He jumped into the elevator, but instead of going to his floor, he stopped on the second floor. He got out and went straight to the apartment he was looking for. He pounded on the door and waited. A moment later, the door opened.

"I need your help," Mike said, brushing past the man inside. His name was Ryan and he was detective in the robbery department at the San Francisco police department. He and Mike had met in the laundry room of the apartment complex a few years earlier. They shared small talk until they bonded over the video games they played as kids. From there they would grab the occasional beer together or watch football on the weekends even though Mike didn't care much

for sports. But it was nice to have a friend outside of work.

"Hey Mike. Come on in..."

"I need you to look up a police report."

"Nice to see you too," Ryan said.

"I have a name and the address that the police were sent to. I need you to..."

"Do you want to tell me what's going on?" Ryan asked.

"There's no time."

"Are you in some kind of trouble?"

"Please. I need your help," Mike begged.

"Mike, I can't just..."

"Do I need to remind you about the time I got rid of that virus on your computer that you swear came from AOL, but we both know came from a porn site? I'm sure your wife would be..."

"Alright, alright..." Ryan interrupted. "Give me the name and address and I'll see what I can do."

"Thank you," Mike said.

Ryan went into the kitchen drawer and grabbed a small pad of paper and pen. Mike jotted down Eleven's address and gave him the name Jane Smith.

"I'll call one of my buddies who's working tonight. Take a seat."

Ryan pointed to a comfortable looking, black leather chair that he had set up in front of his giant television. The TV was tuned to a baseball game, but the sound was muted. Mike was too nervous to sit. Ryan disappeared into the kitchen. Mike began to pace. He ran through every scenario in his head.

Had the government somehow found out who Eleven really was and

she felt like she had to run away? But why would she blame Mike for that? Did she think that he sent federal agents to her home? He hoped she knew that he would never hurt her. Of course the other plausible scenario was that she actually had been involved in something illegal. Was she guilty of money laundering? Mike banished that thought from his head immediately. The woman he had grown to know was not that kind of person. There was no way she could talk about caring about the foster families she worked with so much while at the same time, stealing from them. It didn't make sense. Then there was that emergency meeting that had pulled Eleven away from him at lunchtime. She thought it had something to do with budgets, but did it have something to do with her? How much trouble was she really in? And what could Mike do to help her?

As Mike stared at the TV, not really seeing the game that was being played, but really looking beyond it, he didn't know what to do or think. All he knew was that his heart was breaking. Eleven, the girl he didn't even know he loved as a child had turned into a woman he knew he loved as an adult. But she was gone. And he didn't know if he would ever see her again.

Mike pulled his cell phone out of his pocket and speed dialed her number. Again, the number came up as out of service. If something had gone wrong at the emergency meeting, Eleven had enough of time to shut down her phone service, get to her apartment, pack, and disappear.

Mike was pulled from his thoughts when he heard Ryan coming towards him from the kitchen. He was holding onto one of those yellow legal sized memo pads. The top page had some writing on it.

"What did you find out?" Mike questioned, the words tumbling out quickly.

"Looks like a call came in to San Francisco PD at 11:11 about a Jane Smith who works for the Human Services Agency. The caller claimed he had evidence that this Jane Smith was stealing money from the department and also reported that she was working under a false identity. At first the call was largely ignored and was probably put on someone's desk from the fraud department."

"Wait...what do you mean ignored?"

"The San Francisco police department gets dozens of calls every week that are unsubstantiated. Someone eventually gets around to investigating them, but 95% of them are false claims."

"Wait...so...are the police investigating Jane or not?"

"About ten minutes after the complainant hung up, the fraud department was e-mailed documents that backed up the caller's claims. So, they officially opened a case against Jane Smith."

"Do you know who the caller was?" Mike asked.

"Who is this Jane Smith to you?" Ryan asked, ignoring Mike's question.

"It's not important. Do you know who made the call?"

"She must be important for you to come banging on my door and demanding my help," Ryan replied, still not answering Mike's question.

Mike could feel anger boiling up. He didn't have time to answer Ryan's questions. He just wanted to know what happened to Eleven.

"Just tell me!" Mike shouted.

"Not until you give me some information. Look, I want to help. But you gotta tell me what's going on. Are you in some kind of trouble?"

Mike sighed. Ryan was right. Mike couldn't expect him to just tell him what he needed to know. Mike had to give him something in return.

"Jane is as friend," Mike explained, being purposefully vague. "We knew each other when we were kids and recently reconnected. I was supposed to meet her tonight, but she...she disappeared."

"You mean she stood you up?"

"No, I mean she disappeared. She packed her things and left."

"Sounds like a guilty person to me," Ryan said. "Are you mixed up in whatever she was doing?"

"She wasn't doing anything," Mike stated. "Someone is setting her up."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because I know Jane."

"Look, Mike, I've worked in the police force long enough to know that just because you think you know someone..."

"Just tell me...do you know who the caller was?"

Ryan shook his head. "All we have is a phone number where the call came from. The caller didn't identify himself."

"What's the number?" Mike asked. He knew it was a long shot, but maybe he could figure out who called after doing some digging with the phone number.

Ryan read the phone number from the pad he was holding. Mike froze in his tracks. He knew that number. He knew the number very well. He had given out the number hundreds of times.

"You ok?" Ryan asked, noticing Mike's eyes were suddenly glazed over.

"That's my office," Mike said quietly.

"What is? I don't get it."

"The call came from my office. That's my phone number."

"Wait...I don't understand. Do you think somebody broke into your office and used your phone to call the police? Does someone there hate you that much?"

Finally, it clicked.

"I know who it was," Mike stated. "I know who set Jane up."

Margaret. How had he not put the pieces together earlier? The note

Jane had left him hadn't fallen under a piece of furniture. Margaret had taken it. Which meant that she had Jane's address. Which, Mike knew, meant that she could find out a lot about Jane. With the computer guys at Mike's office and Margaret's pull as the boss' daughter, she could make those guys hack into anything they wanted. They could probably even plant false information about Jane stealing money onto her work computer and then send those documents to the police department.

"Who?"

"Did you say the caller was male or female?" Mike asked.

"Male," Ryan answered.

That wasn't what Mike was expecting, but of course Margaret wouldn't be stupid enough to call herself. She would make one of the guys from the office do it. After all, who else had a vendetta against Mike? Who else would sneak into his office and use his telephone? If Eleven somehow figured out who had called the police on her, she would of course immediately blame Mike. All signs pointed to him as the caller. That's why she ran. That's why she left the photograph for him. She thought he had betrayed her.

"Look, Mike," Ryan continued. "I don't know what you've gotten yourself involved in, but as a cop, I gotta warn you to just let this go, man. Let the cops do their jobs and figure out the truth and..."

"I gotta go," Mike interrupted.

"Mike!"

Mike ignored Ryan as he ran out of his friend's apartment.

Author's Note: Ok, so I know it's been a while since my last update and I apologize for that, but hopefully this longer chapter can make up for it! As always, thanks for reading. There's a lot more to come! (And hopefully I can post again soon)

18. Chapter 18

Chapter 18

As Mike left Ryan's apartment and started to head to his own place, he grabbed his cell phone out of his pocket and quickly searched through his contacts for the number he was looking for. He pressed send and waited. The phone rang five times. Mike was preparing a nasty voicemail message in his head when he was disrupted by the sound of Margaret's voice.

"I was wondering when you would come groveling back," she answered.

It took Mike a moment to respond. He wasn't prepared for her to actually answer. But of course she would. Margaret never backed down from a challenge.

"How could you?" He said, venom dripping from his voice. He had to stop himself from shouting at her even though he so desperately wanted to. But he knew he couldn't. Not if he wanted to make Margaret happy enough for her to take the pressure off Eleven.

"I don't know what you're talking about," she replied.

"You called the police on her. You falsified documents!"

Mike finally made it to his apartment door. He angrily jammed the key into the lock and opened it. He did not want to have this conversation with Margaret out in the open for anyone to hear.

"Actually, the latter was done by Gordon. He might have doctored up a few documents and maybe hacked into your precious Jane's bank accounts."

"Gordon? He was my friend. Why would he do that?"

"Friend? Really, Mike? You went out for one beer one time. You're not very good at taking care of your friends. But me...I know how to hold onto friends."

"What did you promise him? A night in bed with you? That's low, Margaret, even for you."

"Do I sense a hint of jealousy?"

"Screw you!"

"Has anyone told you you need to control your temper?" Margaret asked calmly. Mike hated how relaxed she was. He felt like he was about to explode and she seemed calm as a cucumber. Of course, that's probably what she wanted. She wanted to see him squirm. She wanted to see him in pain.

"Is all of this really just because I broke up with you?" Mike questioned, trying to sound even toned.

"I told you I never lose."

"You're ruining her life!"

"I just wanted to teach you a lesson," Margaret said. "And now that you've learned it, we can get back to the way things were."

"Do you really think after this stunt I would want to get back together with you?" Mike spat.

"Well, with Jane out of the picture, who else is there?"

"I don't care if you were the last woman on Earth. We're not getting back together!"

Mike realized he was losing on the 'kill her with kindness' routine. He just couldn't keep his anger to himself. Margaret had no idea that what she had done went way beyond criminal charges filed against Eleven. With the police asking questions, Eleven's very existence was in jeopardy. Hopper had taken Eleven away to protect her and in just a short time, Mike had put her in danger again. Hopper had been wrong to trust him, Mike realized. Eleven would have been better off thinking she was still just Jane. If she had never met Mike on the street corner that day, none of this would have happened.

"Well, let's see what happens when Jane Smith's name is smeared all

across the news. Of course, that's not her real name. That part of the police report was true. Gordon couldn't find any information about her. Not a birth certificate or anything from before she was a teenager. Did you know that she was living under a fake name? I bet you didn't know she was lying to you."

"You have no idea what you've done," Mike stated.

"I've won," Margaret said simply. "And that's all that matters."

"You need to fix this," Mike said. "You need to call the police and tell them you lied and..."

"That is not going to happen. Why would I ruin my perfect reputation to save a woman I despise?"

"I'm not going to let you get away with this."

"And how are you going to stop me? I'm Jeff Thompson's daughter. Who are you? Just a disgruntled, former employee whose new girlfriend got caught doing something she shouldn't. Nobody is going to believe you or her. Face it, Mike. She's over. And so are you. You'll never work in this town again. And one day...one day you'll realize what a giant mistake you made."

The phone went dead. She had hung up on him. Mike gripped his phone tightly. He wanted to throw something. He wanted to hurt something. He wanted to yell and scream and let the universe know how unfair all of this was. Mike knew he had to fix what had happened. He had to find Eleven and get her back and make things right. But first...first he needed a good, strong drink.

Mike went over to his liquor cabinet and grabbed a bottle of vodka. He took a shot glass down and filled it nearly to the brim. Mike drank back the shot, wincing as the alcohol slid down his throat. He stared at his phone. There had to be someone he could call. Someone who could help him. And that's when Mike knew. The people who always helped him no matter what the situation. He picked up the phone and called Dustin.

"Dude!" Dustin exclaimed when he answered the phone. "Finally! I've

been waiting for you to call. Will said I shouldn't bother you because you needed your space, but I can't believe you found Eleven, man. How is she? Does she remember things? Does she remember me? When do you..."

"I lost her," Mike interrupted.

"What?"

"I lost her," Mike repeated.

"What do you mean you lost her? Is she dead?"

Mike cringed at the use of the word. "No. She's just...gone."

"Mike, what the hell is going on?"

"I need your help."

"We'll be on the next flight out," Dustin said without skipping a beat.

The next morning, Mike was leaning against the brick wall outside the deli, across the street from the Human Services Agency. It was 8:30. He had been there since 7. He knew he had once chance and he didn't want to screw it up.

As a woman jogged past him in her matching pink jogging suit, Mike could feel her eying him warily. Mike realized he must look a mess. After drinking far too much vodka the night before, Mike sat on his couch, staring at the picture of him and Eleven. He wished he had taken a picture of the two of them as adults, rather than just relying on that one picture of them as kids. But that was all he had. He had been interrupted around eleven PM by his police friend Ryan, who had a little more information. He told Mike that there was a warrant out for Eleven's arrest for stealing money from the Human Services Agency. She certainly wasn't on the top 10 Most Wanted List, but she was someone they were actively looking for. If she used her ID to try to get on a plane or rent a car or buy a ticket out of the city, she'd be detained. That news didn't sit well with Mike. If she were caught, it wouldn't be good.

After Ryan had left, promising Mike that he would give him more

information if and when it became available, Mike had called Gordon, the co-worker who had helped Margaret falsify the documents about Eleven. Mike left him a nasty voicemail, because of course the coward wouldn't pick up. Mike threatened to go to the police about what he had done. As soon as he hung up, though, Mike realized that maybe that wasn't the best way to go. He needed Gordon as an ally, not as an enemy.

At some point in the middle of the night, Mike began making lists. He made a list of what he would say to Margaret if he ever spoke to her again. He made a list of what he would give up to see Eleven again. He made a list of all the places Eleven might go. That, unfortunately, was a very short list. He knew she would be smart enough to get out of San Francisco, but he had no idea where she'd go. She had no family or friends. Aside from San Francisco and Hawkins, she had no connections anywhere else. And Mike doubted very much that she'd go back to Hawkins.

Around 3 AM, Mike finally sobered up enough to realize that he wasn't the only one who knew Eleven. After all, she had a whole life in San Francisco before he came into the picture. That's when he knew he had to talk to the one person Eleven had mentioned to him, her friend Sheila who worked with her. If anyone might know where Jane would go, it would be her.

That was why Mike was standing on the street corner outside of Jane's office. He hadn't slept at all the night before. He was still in his dark Jeans and grey shirt. He had taken off the button down at some point in the middle of the night. With his hair uncombed, a bit of stubble on his chin, and his wrinkled grey shirt, he knew he looked a mess.

"Back so soon?" The man from the deli asked, coming out the door and leaning against the doorframe next to Mike. "How's your girl?"

"I gotta get her back," Mike answered.

"What happened?"

As Mike thought about what he was going to tell the deli owner, he saw a woman in a black skirt and white blouse heading for the

building across the street. She had fiery red hair that was piled on top of her head in a loose bun. Mike didn't know what Sheila looked like, but the woman could definitely be a Sheila.

Mike looked both ways and sprinted across the street.

"Excuse me!" He shouted.

The woman stopped. "The office doesn't open until 9 AM."

"Are you Sheila?"

"No."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

Mike wondered if he should ask this woman about Jane, but the way she was scowling at him, she didn't look particularly friendly. He decided it was best to wait for Sheila. The red-headed woman went into the building, practically slamming the door in Mike's face. If he wasn't careful, she was bound to call the police on him for loitering. Mike walked back across the street to the deli.

"That how you plan on getting your woman back? By stalking her co-workers?" The deli owner asked.

"I just need to talk to one of her friends."

"What's her name? People from that building come over here all the time for breakfast."

"Sheila."

"Ahh...Sheila. She'll be popping in here any minute now."

"You know Sheila?" Mike asked excitedly.

"Sheila stops here every morning for coffee. Says I've got the best dark roast in a ten mile radius. You're welcome to come in and wait. Seems you do a lot of that in here."

Mike couldn't argue. He had spent more time in that particularly deli

in the last few days than he felt like he had at home. Mike took a seat right by the window and waited. Four minutes later, a robust looking woman with a long, silver grey braid down her back, a purple peasant skirt and a billowing cream-colored shirt walked in. She looked to be about the same age as Mike's mom.

"Hey Martin," she said, walking right up to the counter.

"Good morning, Sheila," the deli owner replied.

Mike could see the large smile on the man's face. He had a crush on Sheila. Ordinarily the thought would have made Mike smile, but he wasn't in the mood. He had only one thing on his mind.

"The usual," Sheila ordered.

"Coming right up. While you wait, there's someone here who would like to talk to you."

Martin pointed in Mike's direction. Sheila turned.

"Do I know you?" She asked as Mike approached her.

"No."

"All inquiries about our cases or families need to be made during normal business hours," she said. The charming Sheila had been turned off and the professional one was coming out in full force. "You can make an appointment and..."

"I'm here about Jane."

Sheila all of a sudden got a worried look on her face.

"Are you a cop?"

Mike shook his head. "No. I'm a...friend. More than a friend actually."

"You're Mike," she said.

"How did you know that?"

"Jane talked about you. She told me how she met this new guy

named Mike and that she was falling for you even though, she said, it probably wasn't a good idea. I can see why she was falling for you. You're quite handsome."

"Do you know what happened to her?" Mike asked.
Sheila sighed. "Come sit with me."

Martin gave Sheila her coffee and Mike sat with her at a small table away from the door and windows.

"What happened to Jane?" Mike asked.

"Yesterday Jane got pulled into Roxanne's office. Roxanne is the head of the department. She had gotten a phone call from the police about Jane. Something about how they had evidence about Jane stealing money."

"Why would the police tip her off if they're looking for her?"

"When you do this kind of work, you get to know the police officers pretty well. We've made some friends over the years. They were calling us to warn Jane. Roxanne didn't believe it was true. She's always liked Jane. Everybody likes Jane. Jane was...panicked. She said she didn't know what was going on, but of course she denied it and we all believed her. I know Jane wouldn't do something like that. She cares about these kids and the families she works with too much. Roxanne tried to convince Jane to go to the police and to get it all cleared up. After all, if she didn't do anything, how can they say she did?"

"I'm afraid it's a little more complicated than that," Mike said.

"That's what Jane said. She said she had to leave so Roxanne let her go."

"Do you know if Jane found out who made the call to the police?"

Sheila shook her head. "All our police officer friend could tell us was that it was a male and the phone number it came from. I asked Jane if she knew the number, but she didn't say anything. Do you know who called?"

Mike didn't want to lie to Sheila, but he also couldn't exactly tell her the truth. He simply shook his head.

"Have you heard from her?" Mike asked. "Did she say anything about where she was going?"

Sheila shook her head. "No. I just know she was afraid. I'm not sure of what, but she had fear in her eyes. Even though she had the truth on her side, I could tell she didn't want to get involved with the police. I'm just not sure why."

"I have to find her," Mike said.

"I hope you do."

"If you hear from her, would you call me? Please?"

Mike walked over to the counter and borrowed a pen and a piece of receipt paper from Martin. He wrote down his telephone number and gave it to Sheila. She did the same and handed the paper to Mike.

"Same here," Mike said.

He left the deli, feeling defeated. He barely had any more information than when the day started. He wasn't any closer to finding the woman he loved.

Author's Note: Where is Eleven? You'll just have to keep reading to find out. In all seriousness, though, thanks for sticking with me. I know I don't update as much as people would like, but I promise I'm working as fast as I can!

19. Chapter 19

Chapter 19

As Mike rode the elevator back up to his apartment, he couldn't decide what he was going to do first. Get a drink or call Margaret again and curse her out. But, as the elevator doors opened to his floor, Mike's priority shifted. There, sitting against the wall outside his apartment door were his three faces he would recognize anywhere. His three best friends.

"Where were you?" Lucas asked, getting to his feet.

"Yeah, we called you like ten times," Dustin added.

"My phone must have died," Mike realized. He could feel his friends' harsh stares. Seeing them made him want to cry and celebrate all at the same time.

"We were worried," Lucas said.

"Are you ok?" Will questioned, approaching Mike.

Mike shook his head. He was not ok.

Will embraced him and Mike leaned into the hug. It was rare for his friends to hug. A simple high five or slap on the back was the limit to their physical contact. But Mike needed the hug. He needed to know he had somebody in his corner.

"I'm glad you're all here," Mike said. "Thank you for coming."

"So, what the hell is going on?" Dustin asked. "Where's Eleven?"

"Dude, calm down," Lucas said. "We just got here. And Mike looks like he needs a drink."

"And a shower," Dustin commented softly.

"Shut up," Will ordered.

"Let's just...go inside and I'll tell you everything," Mike said.

And that is exactly what they did. After they all got settled in the living room, Mike started from the very beginning. He told the guys how he had first run into Eleven on the street corner, including the information about her 'friends don't lie' tattoo. He told them about the false identity Hopper had made up for her and how she had no memory of her childhood. He told them about the things she could still do with her mind and about what the letter they found from Hopper in the storage unit. He concluded by telling them about how Margaret had gotten Gordon to falsify documents about Eleven and that Eleven now appeared to be running from the law. For as much as he told them, Mike did, however, leave out some of the more scandalous details. He didn't tell them that that she had gotten drunk in the storage unit and had kissed him like he had never been kissed before. And he didn't exactly tell him that he was going to her apartment for their first real date when he realized she had disappeared.

"Wow," Lucas said when Mike was done. "That's...a lot."

"Yeah, it's been a little crazy around here," Mike admitted.

"Why didn't you call us sooner?" Dustin asked, feeling a little hurt.

Mike felt bad that he hadn't included his friends on what had been going on recently. It's almost as if he had forgotten how supportive his friends could be. He made a promise to himself that he wouldn't forget that again.

"I'm sorry," Mike apologized. "I guess I was being a little...selfish. I wanted to keep Eleven to myself."

"And you have no idea where she is?" Will questioned.

Mike shook his head. "She's just...gone."

"Just like she was fifteen years ago," Lucas added.

"I can't go another fifteen years without her," Mike said. "It'll...kill me."

"Is she hot?" Dustin asked seriously.

The boys all stared at him. Will, being the closest, knocked him in the ribs. It seemed like a totally inappropriate question considering what Mike had just told them. But it was Mike who cracked a smile first. Leave it to Dustin to not only break the tension, but also to really want to know if Eleven had grown up to be a good looking woman. It was so very...Dustin. It reminded Mike of their high school and college years. Just four best friends, sitting around, talking about girls.

"Yeah," Mike answered. "She's hot."

Dustin smiled and eventually Lucas and Will did too.

"So, what are we going to do to get Eleven back?" Lucas wondered.

"We?" Mike replied.

"We're in this now," Will said. "We care about Eleven as much as you do."

"Well, maybe not as much," Dustin commented. "I mean, I'm pretty sure Lucas doesn't want to sleep with her or his wife would be pretty pissed."

Lucas reached behind him and grabbed a throw pillow. He hummed it at Dustin, who ducked out of the way. It sailed behind the couch, thudding to the floor. Although he hadn't actually been hit, Dustin grabbed another pillow and threw it in Lucas' general direction. With his terrible aim, however, he managed to hit Will instead. Will caught the pillow and tossed it back at Dustin. Within a few minutes, all of the boys were throwing pillows and chasing each other around Mike's living room. It had been a long time since they had all acted like children and laughed so much.

"This isn't helping," Will said as Dustin was ducking behind one of the couches so as not to be hit by the pillow Lucas was holding.

"Sure it is," Dustin replied. "It's helping Mike take his mind off things."

"And I appreciate that," Mike said, suddenly being brought back down to reality. Eleven was gone and he had no idea where she was. "But we have to find her."

"Didn't you say that Margaret had some guy from your company help her and make the actual phone call?" Lucas asked.

"Yeah," Mike answered. "This guy named Gordon. I worked with him for a few years. I thought he and I were friends."

"Dude, if a smoking hot woman like Margaret asked me for a favor, friendship be damned," Dustin added.

"Nice, Dustin, real nice," Lucas said, shaking his head at his friend.

"Well, if you can't get Margaret to crack, maybe we can get this Gordon guy to tell the truth," Will suggested.

"I tried calling him," Mike told them. "He didn't answer."

Dustin looked down at the watch on his wrist. "Does he usually leave the office for lunch?"

"Yeah," Mike answered. "Why?"

"I have an idea," Dustin announced. By the look in his eye, the other boys knew it was a good one.

At exactly 12:30, Mike was sitting at a pizza place called Frank's that was about a block from his work. He was drumming his fingers nervously on the wooden table he was sitting at. A small pepperoni pizza was sitting untouched in front of him. He wasn't hungry, but he had to order something. The walkie talkie in his pocket crackled.

"Anyone have eyes on him?" Dustin's voice came through.

Mike pulled the walkie talkie out of his pocket and brought it to his lips. "Not yet," he replied. A man sitting a few tables over from Mike gave him an interesting look. It wasn't everyday you saw someone in a restaurant using a walkie talkie.

The walkie talkies were Dustin's idea. Lucas tried to convince him that their cell phones would be just as good, but Dustin insisted that it had to be walkie talkies. And although Mike knew he looked weird sitting there talking into one, he didn't care. The walkie talkies brought back memories of his childhood and the adventures he and

his friends had gone on before cell phones were even invented. Of course Mike didn't just have four walkie talkies sitting around his apartment, which was what prompted the boys to take a trip to the closest Best Buy while Dustin filled them in on his plan to corner Gordon.

There were three take-out restaurants near Thompson's. The pizza place that Mike was stationed at, a burrito place where Lucas and Will were, and a Chinese restaurant that had the best egg rolls in town that Dustin had volunteered to go to. Mike knew that when the guys from his office went out to lunch, they went to one of the three places. Mike then accessed the company's website to find a picture of Gordon since his friends had no clue what he looked like. Each employee at Thompson's has a short biography on the website including a small photograph. As Mike found Gordon's picture, he realized that his own information had been taken down. It hadn't taken long for Thompson's to erase him completely.

With photographs and walkie talkies in hand, Mike and the boys had split up and were in position by 11:30 at each other restaurants. They didn't want to miss Gordon in case he took lunch early.

"Nothing here either," Lucas reported over the walkie talkie. "Maybe this isn't such a good idea."

"It's a great idea," Dustin snapped back. "We just have to wait."

"Maybe he took his lunch from home," Lucas replied. "What will we do then?"

"That doesn't mean the plan is bad," Dustin said.

"I didn't say the plan was bad," Lucas retorted.

"You implied it."

"I did not!"

"Would you two stop arguing," Mike interrupted, staring at the door to the restaurant as the door swung open. But it wasn't Gordon who walked in. Mike was beginning to think that maybe Dustin's plan wasn't such a good idea. I mean, what were they going to do even if

they did find Gordon? They couldn't beat a confession out of him.

"He's here!" Dustin hissed through the radio.

"Are you sure?" Mike asked.

"Get your asses over here now!"

Mike didn't need to be told twice. He dropped a twenty dollar bill on the table, which was more than enough to cover his uneaten pizza and his coke. He stormed out of the restaurant and ran the three blocks to the Chinese place. Lucas and Will were just arriving as well from the burrito place in the other direction.

"What are we going to do now that he's here?" Will asked.

Mike shrugged. "I don't know, but we can't let him go."

The boys entered the Chinese restaurant. Dustin was waving at them frantically from a corner booth with his moppy brown hair falling into his eyes. They walked over to him as casually as they could so as not to draw attention to themselves. Lucas slid into the booth beside him. Will and Lucas sat across from them. A plate with just half an egg roll and a few noodles left was in front of Dustin. Lucas rolled his eyes at him.

"What?" Dustin protested. "I was hungry."

"Where is he?" Mike asked, not caring if Dustin ate everything in the Chinese restaurant.

Dustin pointed to a row of chairs that was set up against the front wall of the restaurant. They were meant for people who were waiting for takeout orders. Gordon was sitting in one of the chairs, his eyes buried in a Chinese menu.

"Did you say anything to him?" Mike asked.

"Like what?" Dustin replied sarcastically. "Hi, I'm friends with Mike and you screwed over our good friend Eleven who has magical powers?"

Mike took a deep breath. It was now or never. If he wanted to get Eleven back, he had to convince Gordon to tell the truth about the documents he falsified. With Will, Lucas, and Dustin behind him, Mike approached Gordon.

"We need to talk," Mike said.

Gordon looked up from the Chinese menu, surprised. "Mike?" He sputtered, clearly surprised to see his former colleague standing before him.

"We know what you did," Dustin said.

"And we want you to fix it," Will added.

"Who are they?" Gordon asked.

Mike could tell that he was already nervous. Gordon wasn't much for confrontation.

"My friends," Mike answered. "You need to go to the police and tell them what you did."

"I don't...I don't know what you're talking about," Gordon insisted, although his voice clearly indicated that he was lying.

"Don't make us do this the hard way," Dustin warned, although none of them knew quite what he meant by that.

"You realize you're ruining an innocent person's life, right?" Mike asked. When Gordon didn't answer, he continued. "I don't get why you would do it. You're a good guy, Gordon. What could Margaret have promised you that would make you do something like this?"

"Seriously, dude, even a hot woman isn't worth committing a crime," Lucas told him.

"It's my job," Gordon admitted.

"What do you mean?" Mike asked.

"Margaret said that if I didn't do what she asked, she would have her

father fire me," Gordon explained. "I need this job."

"You were willing to ruin a woman's life for a job?" Dustin questioned.

"You don't understand," Gordon continued. "My mother is ill. I need the job for the insurance and the money. We wouldn't be able to pay for her medical care without it. Mr. Thompson has always been good to me with money advances and time off to take her to her appointments. I need this job."

Mike didn't speak. He let Gordon's story sink in. Now that Mike thought about it, he did notice that Gordon would be gone from the office for a few hours at a time. Mike always assumed he was taking a long lunch. Was he really taking his mother to the doctor? And unlike a lot of the other employees at Thompson's, who had big salaries and showed them off with fancy suits and even fancier cars, Gordon never showed that he had money. Mike realized he hadn't been the friend to Gordon that he thought he had been. How could he have worked with the man for so many years and not know what his mother was sick?

"That still doesn't give you the right to..." Lucas began.

Mike put his hand up, silencing him. "I get it," he said. "I get why you did it. But we have to set it right. The woman Margaret told you about, she's a friend of mine. Of all of ours. We met her when we were kids. She's had a pretty hard life, but she has dedicated her life to helping kids in the foster care system. And now because of the documents you helped Margaret create, she's on the run from the police. She can't help anymore kids. And the only reason Margaret went after her was because of me. She's angry that I broke up with her. She doesn't take rejection very well."

"Margaret told me that the woman was guilty," Gordon said. "That I was just giving the police the proof they needed to finally arrest her."

"She lied," Mike said. "Margaret is good at manipulating people to get what she wants. We have to make it right."

"I'll go to jail," Gordon protested. "I mean, I know I did the wrong

thing, but I can't go to jail. My mother won't survive without me."

Mike's heart went out to the man. He wouldn't be the first or last man that Margaret had duped.

"I have a friend," Mike told him, thinking of Ryan. "I think we can work something out so that we all get what we want."

Mike could see the guilt eating Gordon up. He wasn't the type of guy who could do something that hurt someone else and not feel bad about it. That was Margaret's department. After a few moments, Gordon nodded. Mike couldn't help but smile. He clapped Gordon on the back.

"You're doing the right thing," Mike assured him.

Mike looked back at his friends. They had done it. They had completed step one. Eleven's name would be cleared. But that didn't mean that Mike was any closer to finding her.

Author's Note: I was a little nervous about this chapter because I wanted to get the reunion of the boys right and to hopefully nail their characters. I hope you liked it! Thanks for reading! Don't forget to review!

20. Chapter 20

Chapter 20

48 Hours Later

Mike, Dustin, Lucas, and Will sat in Mike's living room, each with a beer in their hands. In 48 hours, so much had happened and yet the one thing that Mike desperately wanted to happen hadn't. Eleven was still gone and Mike was no closer to finding out where she was. He had managed, however, to clear her name. After convincing Gordon that he wouldn't go to jail or lose his job, Mike and the others had brought him to see Ryan, Mike's police officer friend. They worked out a deal where Gordon admitted to falsifying the documents that had shown Eleven was stealing from the Human Services Agency. In exchange, he received several hours of community service, which Mike and Gordon both agreed was fair punishment. With Ryan's help, Mike had managed to even get the 'false identity' charge against Eleven thrown out. Even though Jane Smith didn't exist before Eleven's thirteenth birthday, the police were no longer pursuing her because of it.

Mike had gone to Mr. Thompson and reported to him what Margaret had done. With Gordon as his backup, Mr. Thompson eventually believed them. He threatened to cut Margaret off financially, but Mike had a feeling that that wouldn't ever actually happen. Margaret ran off to Germany where she had some friends and Mike guessed she wouldn't return for a long while. Mr. Thompson had offered Mike his job back. Mike didn't even hesitate to say 'no.' He couldn't concentrate on anything except finding Eleven.

Even with her name cleared, Mike had no way of contacting her. Her phone number was still disconnected. The odds were good that she had left the city completely. Mike would have done the same thing. He still had no idea where she would go. Sheila didn't either. Mike felt like that thirteen year old kid again who had just found out Eleven was gone and wouldn't be coming back.

"You should come back with us," Lucas suggested.

Mike was torn from this thoughts. "What?"

"Come back to Hawkins," Dustin said.

"I live here," Mike replied.

"You don't have to," Lucas told him.

"I can't...I can't leave San Francisco," Mike insisted.

"Why?" Will asked.

"You don't have a job," Dustin pointed out.

"You don't have family here. And none of your friends are here," Lucas added.

Mike realized that at some point in the last 48 hours, his friends must have discussed the idea of Mike moving back home. Seeing his friends altogether again did make him miss Hawkins, but he knew he couldn't go with them.

"What if she comes back here? What if Eleven comes back and can't find me?" Mike pointed out. "I can't leave."

"Even I was thinking I might spend the summer in Hawkins," Will told him. "I need a break from New York. Besides, it would do us some good to all be back together for a summer."

"I can't go," Mike protested. "When Eleven realizes her name is cleared, she'll come back."

"Mike," Lucas said softly. "She's not coming back."

"You don't know that," Mike exclaimed.

"You're right, we can't know the future," Will said. "But that doesn't mean that you have to keep living in the past."

"You want me to just forget about her?" Mike questioned, knowing that that was impossible.

"That's not what we're saying," Lucas assured him. "Look, we've been

through this before. We were all there when Eleven left the first time. We helped pull you out of the slump you were in."

"And we'll do it again," Dustin jumped in. "Because that's what friends do. But you don't have to sit here, wasting your life away waiting for her."

"You don't get it," Mike responded. "You've never understood the bond that Eleven and I have. I can't just leave!"

"And what if she never comes back?" Will countered. "How long are you going to wait?"

"I don't...I don't know," Mike admitted. "But I can't just give up."

"Going back to Hawkins isn't giving up," Lucas told him.

"What about that woman Sheila?" Dustin said.

"What about her?" Mike asked.

"If Eleven comes back, don't you think she'd reach out to Sheila?" Dustin continued.

"Maybe," Mike answered.

"Then tell Sheila where you're going and she can pass the information to Eleven if she comes back," Dustin explained like it was the easiest solution in the world.

Mike shook his head stubbornly. "I'm not leaving."

"Mike..." Lucas began.

"Look, I appreciate that you guys put your lives on hold and came out here, I really do. And I know you're just trying to look out for me, but I'm not leaving. End of discussion."

The boys all eyed each other. There was nothing more that they could do. Mike had to make up his own mind about what he wanted. They couldn't do it for him.

One Month Later

Mike took one last look around his apartment. It was still mostly furnished. Just a few knick knacks and personal items were missing. It seemed strange to be leaving the place for the last time. For years he had called the apartment home, but it never really felt like home. Once Mike had made his mind up a week earlier that he was leaving for Hawkins, he realized that only Hawkins was his true home.

It had been a hard decision to leave San Francisco. After Dustin, Lucas, and Will had all gotten on a plane with Dustin and Lucas going back to Indiana and Will to New York, Mike felt incredibly alone. He didn't sleep or eat much for weeks. He just spent his time wondering about where Eleven was. He checked in with Sheila several times, but she still hadn't heard from Eleven. He thought about having Ryan file a missing persons report with the police, but Mike knew that wasn't a good idea. He even considered hiring a private detective, but he decided that wasn't a good idea either. Eleven didn't want to be found and it was safer for her not to be searched for by police or anyone else.

After nearly three weeks of basically being a hermit and never leaving his apartment, Will had called him. He told Mike that he had booked his plane ticket from New York to Hawkins and would spend a few months there over the summer. He said he was ready to go home and be with his friends. Mike knew that was Will's subtle way of telling Mike that he should do the same. Mike was, of course, hesitant. He was afraid if he left San Francisco that Eleven would never find him, but he knew he had to go. The boys were right – he couldn't waste his life away. He truly believed that he and Eleven were meant to be. And if that were true, she would find him anywhere.

Mike had made the decision to leave most of what he owned in San Francisco. He wouldn't need his couches or his expensive TV in Hawkins. Besides, he wanted somewhat of a fresh start, even though he was going to a place where everyone already knew him. Mike had only packed a few boxes and suitcases. He had loaded up a small u-haul truck, including the boxes that his mother had sent with him when he had first moved to San Francisco. The last thing Mike had packed was the photograph of him and Eleven from the Snowball. He

put it carefully into an envelope and placed it in his backpack. He wanted it with him at all times.

Before he left, Mike had said goodbye to Ryan and thanked him for his help. Ryan said they would keep in touch, but Mike doubted it. Ryan was a good person and had been a good friend, but Mike didn't think their friendship would survive and that was ok. The day before, Mike had gone to Sheila and given her all of his contact information in Hawkins. She promised she would get in touch with Mike if she heard from Eleven, but Mike could tell she wasn't too confident that Sheila would ever hear from her.

Mike began his long journey home on one of those rare rainy mornings where the rain fell, but the sun was out. The weather suited his mood. He wasn't exactly happy about moving back to Hawkins, but he wasn't unhappy about it either.

It took Mike two days to drive from San Francisco to Hawkins. When he arrived at his parent's house, he took a moment to stand on the lawn and just look. He had been home for holidays over the years, but this was the first time he was looking at the house with any sort of permanence. The house was exactly the same and yet things felt so different. Mike's mother showered him with hugs when he walked in the front door. His mother was so happy when he had called her to tell her he was moving home. His younger sister teased him that he had to move back home as an adult, but she did so with a smile. Nancy had moved out a while ago, but she still lived nearby and his mother was already promising a big family get together once Mike had settled in.

The first day Mike arrived home, he moved his small amount of belongings back into his old room. He spent time with his family because he knew his mom would be hurt if he hadn't. He tossed and turned most of his first night back home. He couldn't stop thinking about Eleven.

In the morning, Mike woke up and sat down on the edge of the twin-sized bed. He realized for the first since moving that he had no plans beyond making it to Hawkins. He had no job prospects, no place of his own, no Eleven. Suddenly Mike was starting to regret his move.

Slipping on a pair of Jeans and a plain, blue T-Shirt, Mike made his way downstairs and through the kitchen where his mom was asking him what he would like her to make for dinner that night. Mike shrugged. She asked him if there was anything wrong and Mike didn't answer. His mother never knew about the existence of Eleven. It didn't seem to make sense to tell her now. Mike finally ended the conversation by asking her to make meatloaf and he made his way into the basement.

When he got to the bottom of the stairs, Mike looked around. The washer and dryer were, of course, still downstairs as was a newer-looking couch. But in the spot where Mike used to build his fort was an exercise bike and an elliptical machine. Both were covered in so much dust that Mike guessed they hadn't been used in quite some time. Mike vaguely recalled a few Christmases ago where his mother was on a big health kick.

Mike stared at the machines angrily. They had no right to be in his spot in his basement. Rolling up his sleeves, he began pushing them out of the way. Grunting, he managed to slide them a few feet away to the corner of the room. Then Mike looked around for anything he could use to build his fort again. He finally found some old blankets in a plastic bin near the washing machine. He took out the things he needed and set to work.

An hour later, Mike was just placing a blanket inside the blanket fort he had just made when he heard footsteps on the stairs. He looked over and saw Dustin, Lucas, and Will entering the basement. It was a surreal moment. Even though he had seen his friends over the years since he had moved to San Francisco, it was the first time since they were kids that they were all together in Mike's basement. A thousand memories flooded back to him.

"Hey," Lucas said. "Your mom let us in."

"I think she's worried about you," Dusting commented, eyeing the fort Mike had made. "Should we be worried about you?"

Mike didn't answer.

"Want to grab a bite to eat?" Will asked.

"Don't you guys have jobs?" Mike replied, not in a sarcastic way, but in a way that he didn't want his friends ruining their lives just because he had ruined his.

"Summer vacation," Dustin answered, flopping down on the couch. "It pays to be a teacher."

"And the bar is closed on Mondays," Lucas explained.

"I'm free all summer," Will added. "I mean, I do have a few illustrations I'm working on, but I told my agent I was taking some time off."

"Mr. Big Shot has an agent," Dustin mocked.

"Shut up," Will hissed playfully.

"Has anyone been to Harper's cabin?" Mike asked out of the blue. The boys all looked at each other, but no one spoke. "What? What is it? Is it still there?"

"Yeah, it's still there," Dustin said.

"So you have seen it," Mike replied.

Dustin and Lucas nodded.

"We went to take a look as soon as we got back to Hawkins from visiting you," Lucas explained.

"You know, just in case she..." Dustin trailed off.

"In case she came back?" Mike asked, a little bit of hope in his voice.

"She didn't," Lucas said quickly. "She didn't come back. The place is pretty run down. No one's lived in it for fifteen years."

"I want to see it," Mike decided.

"I don't think that's a good idea," Will stated.

"Why not?" Mike asked.

"Because you need to start getting over Eleven, not searching for her

in places from your past."

"I know she's not there," Mike said. "I mean, she didn't even remember the cabin until I told her about it. I can't explain it...I just need to see it."

The boys all exchanged glances again. "Fine," Lucas finally said.

"But can we eat first?" Dustin asked. "I'm starving."

The boys all laughed. Dustin was just being Dustin again. Mike nodded in agreement. A big part of the reason he had moved back to Hawkins was to be back with his friends. As much as Mike wanted to brood in his basement like a teenager, he knew he couldn't. He wasn't a teenager anymore. He was a man. A man who had to live his life. At least that's what he kept telling himself.

Author's Note: I know everyone is waiting for Mike to find Eleven, but I just had to bring the story to Hawkins. After all, what is Stranger Things without Hawkins? Thanks for reading!

21. Chapter 21

Chapter 21

Just as Mike had expected, Eleven wasn't at the cabin. She wasn't there the first day the boys had taken Mike to Hopper's old house in the woods. She wasn't there the second time Mike visited without the others. She wasn't there the third, fourth, or fifth time.

Mike had been back in Hawkins for several weeks. He had spent most of that time either in the basement of his parent's house, re-creating it just as it had been when he was a child, out with the guys, or at Hopper's cabin. Since the first time his friends had gone with him to see Hopper's cabin, Mike had gone back at least a dozen times. He hadn't told his friends about the fact that he had been visiting it several times a week. He knew if he did, they would tell him he was crazy. They had been right about the state of the cabin. It was pretty run down. The roof was leaking right over where the TV used to be in the living room. Grass and weeds and bushes had grown all over the outside of the cabin, making it barely visible unless you knew it was there. The first step to get onto the porch was rotted out. The cobwebs inside were bigger than Mike had ever seen. But none of that stopped him from going.

Every time he went, Mike knew that Eleven wouldn't be at the cabin. After all, she didn't even have any memories of it. She probably wouldn't even be able to find it even if she wanted to. That wasn't why Mike went. He just needed to feel close to her again. Sometimes Mike would sit in the cabin with his old walkie talkie. Miraculously, with a new set of batteries, the thing still worked. He would talk to Eleven, even though he knew she wouldn't answer.

The third time Mike went to the cabin, he had stopped at a local hardware store first. He bought some lumber, nails, a hammer, a broom, and a few other necessary supplies. From that time on, he started fixing up the place, replacing the front steps, weeding and raking the front yard, and cleaning the inside. After several visits, the place was beginning to look habitable again. Fixing up Hopper's old cabin gave Mike a new purpose in life. When he was busy cleaning or fixing things, he wasn't constantly thinking about Eleven. But then

something in the cabin would remind him of her and Mike would feel devastated all over again.

On one particularly hot afternoon, Mike found himself on the porch, drinking a cold bottle of water. He looked around and realized that he had never really spent any time at the cabin with Eleven. It was always hers and Hopper's place. After all, Mike hadn't even known she was living there for almost a year. He hadn't even known at the time if she was still alive. But somehow Mike could see her at the cabin. He could see her making Eggo's in the toaster oven. He could see her watching TV in the living room, just using a flick of her head to change the channels. He could see her lying in bed, thinking about him maybe at the exact same time that he had been thinking about her. Yes, the cabin was full of memories even if Mike hadn't exactly been a part of any of them.

One evening, as Mike was taking a mop to the kitchen floor of the cabin, his cell phone rang in his pocket. He looked at it and saw that it was Lucas calling. Mike noticed he didn't have great reception so far out into the woods, but he answered the phone anyway.

"Hey," Mike said.

"Where are you?" Lucas asked, his voice sounded a little staticy.

"Out," Mike answer. "What's up?"

"What?" Lucas replied, clearly having difficulty understanding Mike.

"I'm just out. What's going on?" Mike repeated, enunciating more clearly to be better understood.

"We're all here waiting for you."

"Waiting for me? What are you talking about?"

"It's 4th of July," Lucas answered.

Mike looked at a clock on the wall that he had recently put new batteries in. It was after 7. He was supposed to meet boys at Lucas' bar at 7:00. Mike sighed. He wasn't in the mood to celebrate America's birthday.

"I don't think I can make it," Mike said.

"Bullshit." It wasn't Lucas's voice that had replied. It was Dustin's. Clearly he had taken the phone away from Lucas. "You better get your ass down here."

"What? You're breaking up," Mike fibbed. Yes, the connection was bad, but Mike had heard Dustin loud and clear.

"Look, Mike, we booked this date a long time ago," Dustin continued. "We made a promise to always get together once a year. This is our once a year."

"We've been together for weeks," Mike reminded him.

"We don't break that promise!" Dustin shouted.

Mike could heard a scuffle on the other end of the phone.

"Come on, Mike," Will said, coming onto the phone. "For old time's sake."

Mike sighed. He knew they were all sitting in their usual spot at Lucas's bar. And he knew they were right. They had never not gotten together on the day they had planned.

"I'll be there in half an hour," Mike finally muttered.

A half hour later, Mike strode into Lucas' bar. It was packed with people wearing red, white, and blue. Patriotic streamers and balloons were all over the place. Mike found Dustin and Will sitting on stools at the far end of the bar with Lucas standing behind the bar. There was an empty stool in between Dustin and Will.

"Glad you could finally make it," Dustin said.

"Yeah, sorry about that," Mike replied. And he was sincerely sorry. He knew since he had been home that he had been distant from his friends and that they were only trying to help. But the truth was that he wasn't over Eleven. He didn't think he'd ever get over her.

"Where were you?" Lucas asked.

"Nowhere. Just out," Mike replied. He wasn't ready to tell his friends that he had been fixing up Hopper's cabin. He knew they would think it wasn't a good idea.

Lucas pulled a cold beer out from behind the bar, popped the top off, and put it down in front of Mike. Mike just stared at it. He wasn't even in the mood to drink.

"So, do you think Buddy Wilson will manage to set the fireworks off this year without hurting himself?" Lucas asked with a laugh.

"He hasn't managed it in twenty years," Dustin replied, sipping his beer. "I don't think this year will be any different."

"Buddy Wilson is still doing fireworks?" Will asked.

"Not very well," Dustin commented.

"You should have seen it last year, Mike," Lucas continued. "He was on the last firework in the parking lot of that hotel off 86 and the darn thing backfired and lit his pants on fire. It was hysterical."

"Sound entertaining," Mike said, sarcastically.

The boys immediately stopped laughing and stared at him.

"Dude, what's up with you?" Dustin asked. "You're being a buzzkill."

"I told you I didn't want to come," Mike answered honestly. "You guys would have a better time without me."

"But we want to have a good time with you," Will told him.

"Yeah, come on, man, you have to get out of this funk," Lucas added.

"Funk? The woman I love is gone and you think this is just a funk?" Mike practically yelled.

"We're just trying to..." Lucas began.

"Help," Mike interrupted. "I know. You're always trying to help. But I don't need or want your help!"

They were all silent for a moment. Mike chugged his beer, his cheeks feeling hot. He knew he wasn't being fair to his friends. He felt like a teenager again, unable to control his emotions. He felt angry all the time and nothing could make him happy.

Will put his hand on Mike's shoulder. "It's ok," he said quietly. "It's ok to be angry. It's ok to want to be alone. But we're here, man."

"I'm sorry," Mike finally said, feeling a little defeated. "I shouldn't have yelled."

"You need something to get your mind off of Eleven all the time," Lucas suggested. "You could help out around the bar. I can't pay you much, but at least it'll give you something to do."

"Thanks," Mike said, but he knew it wasn't a good idea. One summer in college the boys decided to start a lawn care business to make some money. After one day, they had all argued so much that the business never actually took off. They learned that working together was not a good idea.

"There's a new technology position at the high school," Dustin piped in.

"What?" Mike asked.

"Now that they're buying more computers and stuff for the classrooms, they need someone to oversee it all. You know, hook up printers, fix viruses, help teachers learn how to use them properly. You'd be perfect," Dustin explained.

"You want me to teach with you at the high school?" Mike asked.

"Well, not with me," Dustin replied. "I'm in the science department. I mean, we might see each other and stuff, but it's not like we'd be working side by side. You'd be more...all over the place. I mean, I know it's a little below your paygrade compare to Thompson's, but I can talk to the principal if you want. I think he'd like you."

Mike thought it over. The idea of working at his old high school didn't sound too appealing, but it was a job and Mike did need one of those.

"I'll think about it," he said.

A woman came from a doorway behind the bar and sauntered over to Lucas. It was Lucas' wife. Mike didn't know her that well, but Mike knew that she made Lucas happy and that was all that mattered. Lucas put his arm around her waist, his face lighting up with a smile.

"Hey beautiful," Lucas said.

"Hey yourself," she said. "Aren't you supposed to be working?"

"There's plenty of bartenders," Lucas replied, pointing to a few of the employees behind the bar that were serving up drinks without stopping. "Besides, I'm hanging with the guys."

"That's all he talks about these days," his wife said. "With all of you back, I think he'd rather be hanging with you than me."

"That's not true, baby," Lucas replied, kissing her on the cheek. "I love spending time with you."

"Mhmm...", she said with a smile. "Well, you all have fun. I have paperwork to do."

Lucas watched as she walked away, back through the door she came from.

"I am a lucky man," Lucas said, turning his attention back to the guys.

"Cheers to that," Will replied, holding up his beer. The rest of the guys did the same.

"That's what you need, Mike," Dustin said.

"What do I need?" Mike asked, a little afraid of the answer.

"A woman," Dustin replied.

"Dustin, I..." Mike began, immediately thinking of Eleven.

"I'm not talking about a wife. Or even a girlfriend. Just someone you can have fun with. We need to get you laid, man," Dustin said. "Now

that'll take your mind off things."

"I don't need..." Mike began. Another woman was the last thing on his mind.

"What about her?" Lucas asked, pointing to a pretty blond-haired woman sitting at a table nearby with a group of friends. She was sipping a pink drink and threw her head back in laughter.

"I don't want to be set up," Mike insisted.

"We have to get you over this slump, man," Dustin said. "What about the girl at the other end of the bar?"

"I said I don't want to be set up," Mike stated, trying to keep the annoyance out of his voice. "Besides, why don't you worry about your own love life?"

"I'm doing pretty well in that department, thank you very much," Dustin answered.

Mike scoffed and took a drink. "Since when?"

"Since I started seeing Emily Watts."

Mike nearly spit out his beer. "Emily Watts? The Emily Watts? The cheerleader from high school who wouldn't give you the time of day?"

Dustin nodded. "The one and only."

"How's that possible?"

"She's one of the phys ed teachers at Hawkins High with me," Dustin explained. "This past fall she needed help moving some equipment and I happened to volunteer. Then, at the faculty Christmas party we sort of...hit it off."

Mike looked around at Lucas and Will to see if Dustin was pulling his leg. Emily Watts had been one of the most popular girls in school. She was smart, beautiful, athletic and probably didn't even know Dustin's name in high school. By the looks on his friend's faces,

though, Dustin was telling the truth.

"Wait, you're serious?" Mike asked.

Dustin nodded. "Oh yes."

"And you've been dating for how long?"

"About six months," Dustin answered.

"You've been dating Emily Watts for six months and didn't tell me?" Mike asked.

"You never asked."

"Since when do I have to ask? You were the king of blurting out the name of any girl who even so much as spoke to you when we were in college."

"Well, I've matured since then."

"Did you guys know about this?" Mike asked.

"Yeah, we knew," Lucas answered.

"I can't believe I didn't know."

"You were always a little preoccupied with what you had going on in California," Lucas said.

Mike knew Lucas was right. From the minute he had moved out to San Francisco, he had of course kept in touch with his friends, but it hadn't been the same. It was as if they all lived different lives.

"Is there anything else I should know?" Mike asked.

"Will has a big crush on one of the editors at the publishing company he works for!" Dustin exclaimed.

Will punched his shoulder. "I do not!"

"Dude, you talk about her all the time," Dustin reminded him. Lucas nodded in agreement.

"Who is she?" Mike asked.

"There is no she," Will insisted, his ears turning a little pink.

"Her name's Alexis," Dustin began. "She has red hair and likes green tea."

"Why haven't you asked her out?" Mike asked.

"I don't...I can't...it's not that easy," Will finally admitted.

"What's not easy about it?" Lucas asked. "You go up to her and you say, 'hey, want to get a coffee?' If she says no, you walk away and it's no big deal. If she says yes, you get to go out for coffee."

"It's not no big deal," Will said. "We practically work together. It would be...unprofessional."

"Is she your editor?" Mike asked.

"No," Will answered. "I do illustrations. She edits books."

"Then you don't really work together and it's not unprofessional. Ask her out," Mike told him, starting to feel like his old self again. It felt good talking to the guys about everyday things.

"Let's focus back on you," Will said.

"New hottie alert," Dustin announced, staring at the door to the bar.

"I can't believe you just said that," Lucas responded, shaking his head. "We're not teenagers anymore."

"Mike, she's pretty hot," Dustin continued, ignoring Lucas's comment. "You might want to take a look."

"I told you guys, I'm not interested."

"She's coming this way," Dustin stated. "She looks...familiar."

Mike finally turned his head. The woman was coming closer. His jaw dropped.

"El?" Mike whispered.

Author's Note: I know most of you have been waiting to get to this point and we're finally here! Don't worry – there's still a lot more to come! Thanks for reading and don't forget to leave a review!

22. Chapter 22

Chapter 22

"El?" Mike whispered, unsure if he could believe his eyes. But there she was, standing right in front of him in the middle of Lucas's bar. She looked incredible, more beautiful than Mike even remembered. He had memorized her eyes, her lips, every angle of her face. But everything he saw now put what he remembered to shame. She looked heavenly in a white, lacey, sundress complete with her white sneakers.

"Hi," she replied.

Mike couldn't find the words to say anything. He just kept staring. He was so sure that at any moment he was going to wake up and see that it was all a dream. She couldn't really be there. He had searched for her for so long and she was just...there. How was that possible?

"Uh...hi," Dustin said, interrupting the staring contest that seemed to be going on between Mike and Eleven. Neither Mike nor Eleven even turned to look at him. It was as if he wasn't even there. Dustin reached his hand up and waved in between them.

"Dustin!" Lucas scolded. "Give them a minute."

Eleven finally turned to look at Dustin. He was smiling goofily at her. Mike still couldn't take his eyes off Eleven. He was still trying to figure out if she was real.

"I'm Dustin," Dustin said. "Do you remember me?"

"Hi Dustin," Eleven replied, shaking his hand. "I don't really remember much, but I've heard a lot about you."

"And I'm Lucas," Lucas said.

"Hi Lucas."

"And I'm..." Will began.

"Will," Eleven finished.

"Do you remember me?"

"In a...hazy sort of way," Eleven answered.

"It really is her," Dustin murmured to Lucas, but loud enough for everyone to hear. "And she really is hot."

"Dustin!" Lucas and Will shouted all at the same time. Eleven blushed.

"What...what are you doing here?" Mike asked, finally finding the words. He had wanted so desperately to find Eleven that he hadn't thought about what he was going to say once he found her. Or, if she found him.

"I came to find you," she answered.

"See, we told you she'd find you," Dustin stated triumphantly as if it was his doing that Eleven had walked back into Mike's life. "You two are meant to be."

"Seriously?" Lucas said. "Two minutes ago you were trying to get him to forget Eleven and hook up with any girl in my bar."

"Guys!" Will snapped.

Dustin and Lucas stopped arguing. Eleven and Will weren't even paying attention to them. They were back to staring at each other.

"Can we...talk?" Eleven asked Mike.

"You can talk," Dustin replied.

"I think she means in private," Will said.

"There's a storeroom in the back," Lucas told them, pointing to the door his wife had come through behind the bar. "Third door on the right of the hallway."

"Thanks," Mike said.

Mike hopped off his stool. He almost reached out to take Eleven's

hand, but refrained. He wasn't sure what their relationship was anymore. Would she jerk her hand away from him? He just so desperately wanted to touch her to make sure she was real. As Lucas lifted up a section of the bar for Mike and Eleven to get behind the bar, Dustin caught Mike's arm.

"Don't screw this up," he warned. "She is hot."

"Shut up, Dustin," Will and Dustin said together.

Mike and Eleven made their way in silence to the storeroom. Mike closed the door behind them, wanting complete privacy. He looked around. They were surrounded by bottles of alcohol, different size glasses, and other things you need for a bar. Mike wished they were in a little bit more romantic of a spot, but this would have to do. He stood just in front of Eleven and stared.

"You're really here," he said.

"I'm really here," she assured him.

"How did you find me?"

"You invited me."

"I...what?"

"That day after the storage unit. You showed up at that deli outside my office and we had lunch together. You told me about how you meet your friends in Hawkins once a year. You said this year you were meeting on 4th of July at your friend Lucas's bar."

"You remembered that?" Mike asked.

"I was looking forward to it," Eleven answered. "I wanted to meet your friends. To see if I had any memories of them. And I was...I was looking forward to our date. But then...all hell broke loose when my boss got that tip from the police that I was..."

"It wasn't me," Mike insisted, interrupting her. "I didn't call the police about you. I didn't make up those documents. I know the call came from my office, but it wasn't me. I would never do that to you, El. It was Margaret. She was angry with me for breaking up with her and she concocted this whole plan with this guy named Gordon." Mike

couldn't stop himself from telling her everything. He needed her to understand that he would never hurt her. "I had nothing to do with. I would never..."

"I know," Eleven said, holding up her hand to stop him.

"You...what?"

"I know it wasn't you," she told him. "At least I figured that out later."

"So...what happened?" Mike questioned.

"Everything after that phone call was so...confusing. I...I didn't know who to trust. I didn't know if I should stay and fight or run. I had only minutes to make up my mind. I was a coward and I ran."

"You're not a coward."

"I thought it was you at first who had made the call," Eleven said. "The police officer I'm friendly with told me where the call came from. I thought you had...betrayed me. I thought I was wrong about you and that you had fed me this story about the girl I was and had somehow planted the note we found in the storage unit from my father. I convinced myself that you were out to get me, although I couldn't figure out why. So I ran."

"I'm so sorry," Mike said. "Where'd you go?"

"Las Vegas," Eleven answered with a little smile. "I figured it was a good place to get lost. And then I started to try to figure out what was going on and what had happened...how things had gotten so...messed up. But the more I thought about it, the more none of it made sense. I couldn't figure out what you had to gain by calling the police about me. Was I just some stranger you decided to mess with?"

"No, El, that..."

She put up her hand, stopping him again. She needed to tell her story.

"Even though I couldn't figure out a motive, I told myself to forget about you. I told myself I would just start a whole new life. I would

leave Jane Smith and Eleven behind. I would become a new person with no connection to Hawkins or San Francisco or anybody else. But I couldn't do that."

"Why not?" Mike asked.

"Because of you," she answered honestly. "You were always on my mind. The more I tried not to think about you, the more I thought about you."

"It's the same thing for me," Mike said. "I couldn't stop thinking about you."

"I told myself that one day I'd stop thinking about you." She paused. "That if I gave it enough time, I'd get over you. But that didn't happen. I woke up every day thinking about you, wondering if you were ok. Wondering if you stayed in San Francisco, wondering if you ever thought about me."

"I thought about you all the time."

I couldn't get you out of my head no matter how hard I tried," she continued. "In such a short time, I realized that I had...I...I had fallen in..."

She trailed off. Mike had an idea of what she was going to say, but he could tell that something was still holding her back. She brushed away a tear.

"When did you figure out it wasn't me who called the police?" Mike asked.

"Eventually I reached out to the police officer who had warned me about the criminal charges in the first place. She told me the whole story. How the man who was responsible for falsifying the documents had come forward. Finally I put the pieces together and realized it was Margaret. I don't know why it took me so long to figure that out, but..."

"It doesn't matter. I'm just glad you're here."

"Even after I found out it wasn't you and that I was no longer wanted

by police, I thought about running away. I wasn't sure I was going to come here to find you. But I had to. It's like something keeps pulling me to you. It's like..."

"Fate," Mike finished.

Eleven nodded. "I think the universe wants us together."

"I happen to agree with the universe," Mike stated, taking a step towards her. He took her hand, threading his fingers through hers. It felt good to be connected to her again. It felt right.

"I really want to kiss you right now," Mike said, looking into her eyes.

"I really wish you would."

They leaned in towards each other. Mike's eyes closed as his lips touched Eleven's. She moved her mouth against his. Mike felt electricity coursing through him. She put her hand on his chest and the kiss deepened. Mike wrapped his arms around her waist, pulling her closer to him. He wanted to pour every ounce of himself into that kiss. He wanted her to know how much he had been longing for her; how much he missed her. And by the way she was kissing him back, he guessed she was feeling the same.

"Wow," Eleven whispered when they finally parted, both gasping for breath. Her lips were pink and swollen from his lips. It only made him want to kiss her more.

"Yeah," Mike agreed, his own head unable to form words. He felt intoxicated. Only she could do that to him. "We...we should get out of here."

"Actually I...I'd like to spend time with your friends if that's alright."

Mike smiled. As much as he wanted to take her away from the bar and get her somewhere private, he also admired her sense of friendship.

"They're your friends, too," Mike reminded her.

"I'd like to...get to know them again. Is that alright?"

"Yeah," Mike replied. "Of course. They'd like that too. Just promise me one thing."

"What's that?"

"That you won't run away from me again. We have some...unfinished business."

"Do we?" Eleven asked with a laugh. Mike could see her eyes had grown dark and sexy. She was making it very difficult for him to not just take her on the floor of the bar's stock room.

"Yeah, I'd say we do."

"Well, in that case, I promise not to run away," she agreed, kissing him once more.

"Ok then. Let's go hang out with our friends."

Mike took Eleven's hand. Together, they walked back to the main part of the bar where Dustin, Lucas, and Will were all nursing a second beer.

"So...everything...alright?" Lucas asked as Mike and Eleven approached them. Mike pulled out the barstool he had been sitting on for Eleven and she sat. Mike put his hand on her shoulder.

"It will be once you get her a drink," Mike replied with a smile.

Lucas quickly grabbed a beer from behind the bar, popped the top off and put it down on a cardboard coaster in front of Eleven.

"Thank you," she said.

"So, Eleven," Dustin began. "What have you been up to these last fifteen years?"

Everyone laughed and she began to tell them her story. All the while, Mike couldn't take his eyes off of her.

After spending several hours at Lucas' bar with the boys, Mike finally convinced them that he and Eleven needed their alone time. With

promises of getting together again soon, Mike led Eleven out of the bar and to his car. He opened the passenger door for her and she slid inside.

"So...where are we going?" Eleven asked once Mike had gotten in on the driver's side of the car.

"Where do you want to go? There's the cabin you lived in with Hop... your dad."

"I don't know...I don't know if I'm ready for that yet," Eleven replied honestly. "But I've been...remembering more."

"Like what?"

"Like you finding me in the woods that night in the rain. I remember you taking me home and trusting me even though you had no reason to. And I remember those bullies who tried to make you jump off a cliff."

"I did jump off a cliff," Mike reminded her. "And you..."

"I saved you," she remembered.

"Yeah, and then you broke Jared's arm, which was pretty awesome. Do you remember anything else?"

She nodded. "The Snowball. I remember dancing with you and...we kissed."

"That was a really good night," Mike stated.

"I felt safe with you. That's what I remember most. Feeling safe."

"I'm glad you're starting to remember more."

"I don't have very many memories of my dad yet from that time. The only things I seem to remember are about you. Some of it feels like it's somebody else's life. Like I'm remembering things that happened to a stranger. But it was my life."

"Yeah, it was. It still is your life. Or at least it can be again."

"Do your parents still have your house?" Eleven asked. "The one you lived in when we first met?"

"Yeah. That's where I've been staying since I moved back to Hawkins."

"Can we go there? It might help with some of the memories."

Mike nodded. He started the car and began driving down the road towards his parent's house. As he drove, he reached over and took Eleven's hand. She blushed as he brought her hand to his lips and kissed each of her knuckles.

"I'm glad you're back," he said.

"Me too."

Author's Note: Well, our dynamic duo is back again. I hope everyone approves of their reunion. Trust me – the reunion isn't over yet!

23. Chapter 23

Chapter 23

As soon as Mike pulled into his parent's driveway, he put the car in park, turned off the engine, and raced around the other side to open Eleven's door for her. Before he could get there, however, the door opened. As Mike looked at Eleven, he noticed her hands were folded in her lap. She was looking at him with a smile. A small amount of blood was coming from her nose. She hadn't touched the door at all. She had opened it with her mind.

"I've been practicing," she said.

"I see that," Mike replied also with a smile. It was good to see Eleven back to normal again, whatever normal was. Mike held out his hand and she took it. He helped her out of the car.

"I can do...a lot," she said.

"You have no idea."

"I started trying different things when I was hiding out in Las Vegas. I could open doors, I could pick things up and bring objects to me, I could crush cans. I even crushed a large paint can once. Each time I do something it...it gets a little easier."

"Well, you've been out of practice for a long time."

"And each time I did something new, I wanted to tell you about it."

"I'm sorry I wasn't there."

She shook her head. "It wasn't your fault. I'm the one who left."

"I bet your powers could be useful in a place like Vegas," Mike said jokingly.

"I made myself a promise that I would never use my powers for evil," Eleven replied.

"Come on, winning a little bit of money isn't evil, is it?"

Eleven playfully pushed him, but still held onto his hand.

"Did I really...flip a van once?" She asked.

Mike laughed out loud. "Yeah, you did. You saved our lives. It was pretty awesome."

"Well, I don't think I'm ready to flip a van anytime soon, but I would like to keep practicing."

"And I'll be right there with you."

She smiled. "I like the sound of that."

With fingers entwined, they walked towards the front door. Eleven stopped in the middle of the walkways and looked up at the house.

"Do you remember anything?" Mike asked. "Does the house look familiar?"

Eleven shrugged. "Maybe. It's hard to tell."

"Well, maybe being inside will help. Although my mom has updated it over the years."

"La-Z-Boy," Eleven said suddenly.

"What?"

"There was a La-Z-Boy."

Mike smiled. "Yeah, my dad had a La-Z-Boy. It was his favorite chair. I showed you how it worked. They got rid of it a while ago. The thing was pretty gross."

"When my dad and I went shopping for new furniture once, I insisted on a La-Z-Boy," Eleven told him. "I never knew why."

"Come on, let's see what else you remember."

They continued their walk to the front door. Mike pulled his key from his pocket and opened the door.

"Are you parents home?" Eleven asked.

Mike shook his head. "They're on a cruise with my little sister Holly," he answered. "We've got the whole house to ourselves for a few days."

Eleven looked at him with a raised eyebrow. Mike realized just how much that sounded like a bad teenage pick-up line. But he didn't care. Eleven was back. They were back together in the place where it had all began. Mike grabbed a napkin from the kitchen and handed it to Eleven. She dabbed at the blood under her nose, wiping it away.

After throwing the napkin away, Eleven walked into the living room and over to the mantle over the fireplace. She looked at the framed photographs. She had this strange, hazy memory of having done that once before, but somehow she knew that some of the pictures had changed. Nancy's high school portrait was replaced with a photograph of her with a man and two children. They were all smiling.

"Is that Nancy? Your sister?" Eleven asked.

Mike nodded. "Yeah, with her husband and kids."

"She's pretty."

Mike smiled. "You said that once before. When you didn't think you were so pretty because your head was shaved. But I always thought you were pretty."

Mike could see her cheeks flush. He made a mental note to remind her of how beautiful she was often.

"My dad used to tell me that all the time," Eleven told him. "That I was pretty. I thought it was...annoying. You know, just a dad being a dad."

"He wasn't wrong," Mike said. "You are pretty. You always have been."

"Thank you," Eleven replied, still blushing.

Eleven continued to look at the photographs. There was a senior class

picture of Holly, Mike's younger sister. Holly no longer looked like a child. Instead, she was practically a grown woman. There was still a picture, though, of Mike, his parents, Nancy, and Holly from when they were younger. It was exactly how Eleven remembered Mike to look in her dreams.

"Does anything seem familiar?" Mike asked.

Eleven nodded, looking away from the photographs. "A little. It's like...it's like having *déjà vu*, but not being sure if these things I'm remembering are actually memories or a dream or...or something else. It can be exhausting trying to figure it all out."

"It's ok," Mike told her. "It's ok to remember or not remember. I'm just glad you're here."

She smiled. Mike couldn't take his eyes off her lips. He so desperately wanted to kiss her again. She locked eyes with him and gave him a slight nod. She clearly wanted the same thing. Mike took a step towards her and cupped her cheek with his hand. She tilted her head up and kissed him with a little more fervor than they had at the stockroom in the bar. Mike was definitely glad that his parents weren't home as their lips danced.

"I want to show you something," Mike said, practically breathless from their kiss.

Taking her hand, Mike led Eleven down to the basement. When they reached the bottom step, she glanced over and saw the blanket fort he had built. She looked at him and smiled.

"I slept here," she said. "That first night when you brought me home. You let me use your sleeping bag and I slept in the fort."

"You remember?"

"There was thunder," she continued. "I was...scared. I didn't like the noise. Your friends didn't think I should stay. They thought I was... strange. But you let me stay. You were so...kind to me. I knew I was safe."

"You're always safe with me."

"I can't believe after all this time that the tent is still up," Eleven commented.

"It hasn't been," Mike explained. "After you left with Hopper, I...I took it down. It was too...painful I guess. I told myself that it was just because I was getting too old to play in forts, but really I just couldn't bear looking at it knowing that you'd never be there again."

"Then how is it..."

"I re-built it a few weeks ago when I came back to Hawkins," Mike admitted, feeling a little silly. He knew grown men didn't usually go around building forts in their parents' basements.

"Why?" Eleven asked, non-judgmentally. Somehow whatever Mike did or didn't do or said or didn't say, Eleven always understood him.

He shrugged. "I don't know. Maybe because I just wanted things to feel like they used to. Maybe I was hoping if I built it, it would be like some beacon calling you home, which I know is ridiculous.'

"It's not ridiculous," she assured him, putting her hand on his arm.

"I was pretty...messed up after you left San Francisco. I didn't know whether to stay there or come home with my friends. It felt like no matter what I did, it was the wrong thing. The idea of never seeing you again after I had had you back for such a brief time was killing me."

Mike had to blink back tears, remembering the nights that he had cried over losing Eleven both the first time as a teenager and the second time as an adult.

"I'm sorry."

"You have nothing to apologize for. I'm the one who should be sorry."

"You did nothing wrong," Eleven assured him.

"I should have...I should have just left you alone."

"What?"

"If it wasn't for me stopping you on that street corner that day, none

of this would have happened. You would still have your job and you'd be in San Francisco and you'd be living your life and..."

"And you'd still be with Margaret and at a job you didn't love," Eleven interrupted. "And we'd still be apart. I'm glad you found me. I'm glad you stopped me on that street corner."

"You are?"

"Of course. Even after...everything. I'm glad I know who I am and where I came from. If it weren't for you, I'd still be living my life as a lie. I mean, what if I found the note my dad left in that storage unit without you with me? At least I had you to make sense of it all. I'm just sorry I didn't believe you from the beginning. We could have avoided a lot of trouble if I believed in you that café."

"I don't think I would have believe me either. It's a crazy story."

"Well, just know that I'm very glad to have met you again," Eleven stated.

Mike couldn't help but smile. He was about to bring Eleven back upstairs, wondering how she would feel about taking a tour of his bedroom next when Eleven made her way over to the tent. She kneeled and picked up Mike's old two-way radio.

"Does it still work?" She asked.

"It turns on," he answered, squatting in front of her so they were at eye level with each other. "There's no one on the other end." Mike stopped before he said too much.

"What is it?" Eleven prodded, sensing that there was more to the story.

"It's stupid, but I...I...ah...I tried talking to you with it."

"You did?"

"Yeah. I know it was dumb. I mean, you probably don't even remember that we used these radios to communicate, but you used to be able to channel the upside down with the radio and sometimes we

would use it to talk when you were at Hopper's cabin. That is, after I found out you were living there."

"Should I stay or should I go," Eleven sang quietly.

"What did you say?"

"That song is always playing in my dreams and it's always coming out of a radio like this one. I just never understood why."

"Will," Mike began. "Will sang it in the upside down. We could hear it when you were channeling him. It's how we knew he was still alive."

Eleven put the radio down. She slid onto her behind and scooted into the tent. She leaned back and looked Mike square in the eye.

"When I was a teenager," she began. "I felt this void. Like something was missing in my life. I always just thought it was my mother. I thought I just missed having a woman in my life to guide me. But I don't think it was her."

"No?"

"No. I think it was you. I think somewhere in the back of my mind, I knew you were out there. And I knew you were missing even though I didn't even remember that you existed. The minute you stopped me on the corner in the rain and asked if my name was Eleven, that void was filled. I didn't know it then... I didn't know what that meant. But...I do now. It's you, Mike. It's always been you."

He ended her sentence with a kiss. She laid back and he followed her down, kissing her with passion. She buried her hand in his hair while Mike's hand began a journey down her body. She moaned when his lips attacked her neck. Every inch of skin that Mike touched felt like fire under his fingertips. He had never felt this way before. Certainly never with Margaret or any other girl he had been with. As Eleven's fingers tugged on the ends of his shirt, trying to rid him of it, Mike found a very sensitive spot beneath her earlobe. He kissed her there and she moaned his name. Their names were the only words spoken for the rest of the night.

The next morning, Eleven opened her eyes to a blanket fort overhead.

She had had no dreams that night, no reason to question if what was in her head was real or not. The fort was real. The very pleasant memories of the night before were real. The handsome man next to her, snoring quietly was real. Eleven snuggled in closer next to Mike. Together, they were in his sleeping bag, both completely naked. She felt his heart beating against the palm of her hand. She breathed him in, pressing her lips against his neck.

"Hey," he said sleepily.

She raised her head slightly so she could look into his eyes.

"Hey yourself."

"I think this just fulfilled every teenage fantasy I've ever had."

Eleven laughed. "Does that mean I'm the first girl you've slept with in a fort?"

"That would be a yes. Believe it or not, not too many women find it sexy to have sex in a tent in my parents' basement."
She laughed again, pressing her lips against his softly.

"Well, I'm happy to be the first."

She curled herself against him, leaning her head on his bare chest. He stroked her long, brown hair, reveling in every feeling. He focused on his skin against hers, her smell, the slight up and down motion of her body as she took each breath. Mike could get lost in her and he never wanted to be found.

"El, there's something I want to tell you."

"Ok."

"Something important."

Eleven hoisted herself up on her elbow so that she could see his face. She pressed the sleeping bag against her chest, covering herself. Suddenly she felt self-conscious. Mike had a very serious look on his face. Her morning suddenly went from bliss to fear. What could he possibly have to tell her?"

"What...what is it?"

"I love you," he said, looking into her eyes.

She stared at him, her brain trying to process his words.

"What?" She whispered.

"I said I love you. I've been in love with you since I was twelve years old. I..."

"That's what you wanted to say?" She interrupted.

Mike was surprised at her reaction. "Yes. Is something wrong? Am I moving too fast? I know this is still sort of new for you and..."

"I thought you were going to tell me you regretted last night! Or...or that you and Margaret were back together or something!"

"What? No! I could never regret last night. Last night was incredible. As for Margaret, she is out of my life forever. You are the only one I want. The only one I've ever wanted. I love you, El. You're beautiful and amazing and caring and I don't ever want to lose you again."

Eleven crashed her lips against his, kissing him hard. He wrapped his arms around her back, holding her on top of him.

"I love you, too," she whispered into his ear.

Mike rolled them so that he was on top of her. Keeping his weight off of her, he held his head centimeters from hers.

"You're not just saying that because I said it first, are you?"

"Friends don't lie, remember?" She replied with a mischievous twinkle in her eye.

As Mike kissed her, he poured everything he could into that kiss. As he thought back to all of the times he missed her or wondered where she was, Mike knew that every part of their journey had led them to this moment and he wouldn't have changed a thing.

Author's Note: Ok, so let me just say that this chapter was difficult to

write for some reason. I knew what I wanted to happen and I knew that I wanted it to be all about Mike and Eleven, but I had a really hard time getting the chapter to a place where I felt good about it. So, I hope you liked it and thanks for reading. I'm thinking there's about 2 chapters left so stay tuned because we're almost at the end! (And on a personal note, I got to go to Stranger Con New Jersey last weekend and meet Millie Bobby Brown and Noah Schnapp and it was epic!)

24. Chapter 24

Chapter 24

It had been four days since Eleven had returned to Hawkins to find Mike. It had been the best four days of Mike's life. With his parents and younger sister gone, Mike and Eleven had the whole house to themselves. They spent a lot of that time either in Mike's room or in the tent in the basement wearing very little clothing. They had gone out twice with Will, Dustin, and Lucas. The boys were very interested in knowing what powers Eleven still had. Mike had to remind them more than once that she wasn't a science experiment and they needed to stop pestering her with so many questions. Overall, though, it was nice to have the gang back together. They were already talking about starting up a game of dungeons and dragons, something they hadn't played in a very long time. Eleven and Mike had gone over to see Nancy and her family one night for dinner. Having no idea that Eleven was even back in the picture, Nancy was ecstatic to see her. The two women bonded over girly things while Mike played with his niece and nephew.

Mike had also gone to meet with the principal at the high school he and the other boys had attended; the one that Dustin worked at. As he said he would, Dustin had recommended Mike for the position in the technology department. The principal liked Mike and offered him the job on the spot, even though he was over-qualified. Despite the fact that it wouldn't be nearly as glamorous as working for Thompson's, Mike happily took the job. He finally felt settled and happy about his future, something he hadn't felt in a very long time.

"So..." Eleven said, pulling Mike from his thoughts. They were sitting around the kitchen table at Mike's parents' house. The sun had just begun to set outside, casting the house in a pale orangey glow. Eleven was drizzling chocolate sauce over an Eggo Waffle.

"How can you eat that?" Mike asked, crinkling his nose at her dessert.

"You've never even tried it," Eleven said.

"Yeah, cause it's gross."

She rolled her eyes, adding a spoonful of plain m&m's on top of the waffle.

"What are we going to do about your parents and sister coming home tomorrow?" She questioned, taking a large mouthful of the dessert she had concocted.

"I told you, I'll just introduce you to them and tell them that you'll be staying with us."

"Mike, you can't just expect your parents to accept me."

"Why not? You're my girlfriend."

They both let the word sink in. It was the first time either of them had used that word to describe their relationship.

"Am I?" She finally asked.

"Aren't you?"

"I don't know. We haven't really...talked about it."

"Well, I just sort of assumed that since we admitted our love for one another and have been spending every day together that you were my girlfriend."

"Oh."

"Do you not want to be my girlfriend?" Mike asked, suddenly worried about her response.

"Of course I do. It's just...a woman likes to be asked."

Mike had to stop himself from letting his jaw drop. Despite the fact that Eleven was no ordinary woman, she was a woman with insecurities and questions and a need for some tradition in her life.

"Ok," he said. "Will you be my girlfriend?"

"Yes," she answered quickly with a large smile.

"Well, I'm glad that's taken care of. And don't worry about my

parents. They'll be fine."

"It's not going to be fine. This is their house. When they left on their cruise, as far as they knew, you were single. Now, ten days later, you have a girlfriend that you want living with them? That's not ok."

"Then we'll tell them that I've known you longer."

"What exactly do you plan on telling them? That you hid my existence from them as a kid and let me sleep in their basement? Mike, this is a no win situation. I told you, let me get a hotel. It'll be..."

"I'm not letting you stay in a hotel. I'm not letting you out of my sight again."

"Mike..."

"There is another solution," Mike interrupted.

"What's that?"

"Hopper."

"My...dad?" Eleven questioned.

"Yeah. Hopper's cabin. It's still there. It's...yours."

"Mine?"

"Well, you are his daughter." Mike paused while he could see Eleven mulling over the news. "I know you said you weren't ready to see it before, but maybe it's time we went there. Maybe it's time you saw the cabin again."

Eleven didn't answer at first. She was holding her fork close to her mouth, chocolate sauce dripping off the piece of the waffle that she was about to eat.

"Ok," she agreed. "On one condition."

"What's that?"

"You have to try a bit of this waffle."

Mike stared at her. He had expected her condition to be something serious, something about her memories or her childhood. But no. Instead, she wanted him to try eating one of the things that he found most disgusting, but that she really loved – a dessert waffle.

"Fine," he huffed.

Eleven held the fork out to him. He took the whole piece into his mouth with chocolate sauce dribbling down his chin. Eleven watched him eat.

"Well...?"

"It's..." Mike said, chewing. "It's...not that bad."

Eleven laughed. "I told you. But you've got a little chocolate sauce on your chin."

Although she had a napkin next to her, Eleven leaned forward and wiped the chocolate off his chin with her finger. She brought her finger to her own mouth and ate it. Mike practically lunged across the table to kiss her.

The next morning, Mike drove them to Hopper's cabin, or at least as close as he could get in the car. They had to walk a decent way through the woods to actually get to the building. The whole time, he held Eleven's hand. He wanted her to know that she wasn't alone. He knew that seeing the cabin would be difficult for her, even if she had no specific memories of it. Ever since finding out that Hopper had basically lied to her her whole life, Mike knew that she had struggled with her feelings towards the man she knew as her father. And Mike couldn't blame her. He couldn't imagine how he would feel if all of a sudden his parents told him he wasn't who he thought he was and that they weren't really his parents.

"This is it," Mike said as the cabin appeared through the trees.

They both stopped to look at it. He could see Eleven taking it all in. He could also tell that she was trying to remember. She always got a very serious, concentrating look on her face whenever she was trying

to figure out if something was a dream or memory or none of the above.

"We actually lived here?" Eleven asked. "Just me and my dad?"

Mike nodded. "Yeah. For almost a whole year before I knew you were alive."

"And it was just the two of us?"

"Hopper just wanted to keep you safe."

"Can we...can we go in?"

"Of course. It's your cabin now."

Together they walked up the steps to the small porch. Mike inserted a key. On one of his many trips to the cabin, he had changed the locks. They stepped inside. Mike quickly turned on the lights.

"It's...clean," Eleven stated. "You said it's been vacant for years. I expected it to be run down."

"It was," Mike admitted. "I've been fixing it up."

"For me?" She asked, tears in her eyes.

"Hoping that you'd come back, yeah," Mike replied.

Eleven wrapped her arms around his neck, hugging him tightly.

"Thank you," she whispered.

Mike held her, his arms around her waist. He would never get tired of holding her, not after they had been apart for so long.

"Do you remember anything?" Mike asked after they had parted and Eleven started looking around.

"No," she answered. "It's so unfamiliar. Why is it that I can remember so many moment with you, but not with him?"

"Maybe it's just easier to remember him as your dad when you were a

teenager."

She shrugged. "Maybe."

Eleven wandered into the small bedroom where she had slept as a young teenager and then back out again into the living room. Mike watched her.

"So...what do you think? Would you want to live here?"

Her eyes fixated on the television in the living room. She looked from the TV to Mike. He could tell she had something on her mind.

"I want to try something," she said.

"Ok."

"You told me I could get into people's heads. That I can see things that they were seeing."

"Yeah."

"I want to try that."

"Whose head do you want to get into?"

"My dad's," she answered.

Mike didn't know what to say. He wanted her to be in control of her powers and learn how to use them, but he was worried that this wasn't a good idea.

"El, I don't know if you even can. I mean, your dad's dead. I don't know..."

"I need to do this, Mike. I need to try."

Mike sighed. The last thing he wanted to do was to see Eleven hurt or disappointed, but if she needed to try something then he would be right there at her side.

"Ok."

"I have these weird dream memories of...of a TV that's not quite on the right channel and...and a blindfold."

"Sensory deprivation," Mike explained. "You have to tune out everything else in order to get into the right mindset."

Mike went to the kitchen closet and found a towel long enough to wrap around Eleven's eyes. She sat herself down in front of the TV and they managed to get it to a station that showed nothing but the black and white fuzzy specks. Mike tied the towel around Eleven's head so she couldn't see. He sat down beside her and took her hand. She squeezed his hand, but then let it go. As he had told her, she needed to be totally deprived of her senses. She put her hands gently on her knees and concentrated. She blocked out everything but the sound of the garbled television and she thought about her father.

It didn't take long before Eleven found herself walking through a black void. It was as if it had no end and no beginning. She could walk forever in the blackness and never find light. She was scared, but she felt like she had been there before and she also knew that she had to be there. She knew there was something she had to do. Suddenly an image appeared to her right. She turned and saw her father in a tan sheriff's uniform with a matching hat on top of his head. He had a scruffy beard and he looked exhausted. She had never seen him look like that before. He was always clean shaven. He was talking in anger to a man in a doctor's coat that Eleven didn't recognize. Eleven walked right up to where the two men stood. She wanted to reach out and touch her father, but she knew she couldn't. Even though it looked very real, he wasn't really there and she knew that.

"You said she was safe," her father snarled. "That everyone who knew about her was dead!"

"That's what I thought, but I've heard that there are still people out looking for her. They won't stop until they find her."

"Tell me what to do."

Eleven could hear the sadness in her father's voice.

"I can't do that."

"Then...then take her powers away. Make her an ordinary girl."

"I can't do that, either. She was born that way. There's no fixing her to be normal."

"Then what am I supposed to do?"

Her father was begging now, but the man in the doctor's outfit had no answers for him.

"Do what you have to do to keep her safe," the doctor said.

The image disappeared.

"Dad!" Eleven yelled, wanting to see his face again.

In the living room of Hopper's cabin, Mike heard Eleven cry out. He didn't know what she was seeing, but he knew she had found her way into her father's memories. He had no idea how she could do it. After all, her father wasn't even alive. But Mike guessed Eleven had abilities that even she didn't know about. He wanted to touch her, to reassure her, to tell her that he was still there with her, but he didn't. If he touched her, it might pull her from wherever she was and he knew that she needed to finish her journey. So Mike just sat next to her and watched.

Back in the black void, a new image flashed behind Eleven. She whirled around and this time saw her father pacing in what looked like some kind of long corridor. He was running his hands over his scruffy beard. He looked more tired and weary since the last image. Gone was his sheriff's uniform and hat. Instead he had on Jeans and a black shirt. The doctor he had been speaking to earlier came through a door.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" The doctor asked.

"You said I had to do whatever I could to keep her safe. This is what I have to do."

"This drug is...experimental."

"You said you've had success with it before."

"Yes, but the long-term success is unknown. Although her entire memory will be erased, it's possible she will start to remember things after a while."

"I'll take my chances. I need to get her somewhere safe. And in order to do that, I need her to forget who she is. Forget Hawkins. Forget the upside down. Forget Mike. I'll figure out the rest later."

"And you?" The doctor prodded.

"What about me?"

"Well, you can't very well stay in Hawkins if you want her to be somebody else. That means you'll have to leave behind your home, too."

"This isn't about me. This is about her. I can survive anywhere. I'd do anything for her. I love her like she was my own daughter."

The doctor nodded. "You're a good man, Sheriff Hopper."

He left the room through the door he had come from. Eleven guessed she was on the other side of the door, though she couldn't see herself. Eleven knew that this was the moment where her memory had been erased. The moment her father had allowed someone to take her past from her.

"What are you doing?" Eleven shouted, staring at her father. Of course he could not hear her, but she couldn't help herself from shouting. "You don't need to do this!"

Eleven stopped yelling when she saw her father fall to his knees, his face buried in his hands. His shoulders were shaking. He was crying. Eleven simply watched him. She had never seen her dad cry. After a moment, he looked up to the sky.

"Tell me I'm doing the right thing," he said to no one. "Tell me she will be ok. I can't lose another daughter. I can't face that. Please!"

He lowered his head and started to cry. Tears streamed from his eyes,

running down his face and falling onto the floor.

"Dad..." Eleven whispered, wishing desperately that she could comfort him.

"I'm sorry, El," he said. "I'm so sorry. Please forgive me."

Although she knew that he wasn't actually talking to her, she could feel him. She felt as if he was saying sorry directly to her and she realized that she accepted it. She knelt down so that she was only inches from him.

"It's ok, dad," she said softly.

At that moment he lifted his head to stare at her. It was impossible for him to see her, but somehow it felt like she could. And then the image disappeared and Eleven was left in the blackness.

"No!" She cried out. "No! No! Dad! Come back!"

She spun around, hoping desperately for another image to appear, but none did.

"Dad! Come back! Dad!"

She felt herself being shaken. The blackness was fading. Eleven could tell she was back in the living room again. Mike was shaking her shoulders.

"El?" He was saying. "El, are you ok? Talk to me, El."

Eleven pulled the towel off her head. Mike was right in front of her, worry in his eyes.

"Mike..." she whispered.

Mike threw his arms around her, hugging her in relief.

"I thought something was wrong," he said. "You were shouting and... and I thought something had happened."

"I'm alright," she told him although she could feel her body physically

shaking. Now that it was all over, she felt like she wanted to cry. She clung on to him, letting a few tears fall.

"What happened?" Mike asked when she finally pulled away from him. "Did you see memories of your dad?"

She nodded. "I know why he did it."

"Did what?"

"Erased my memory. Took me away from here. I understand."

"Is that what you saw? Your dad erasing your memory?"

She nodded. "I saw him making the decision. And I think...I think it was the hardest decision he ever made. I've been so unfair to him this whole time."

"You can't blame yourself," Mike said. "Anyone would be angry if they found out everything you have in the last few months."

"But I've been so angry with him for lying to me my whole life. There are times in that last month I've even hated him." She paused. "But I understand now. I could see it on his face. And I never thought about what he had to give up to keep me safe. He did what he had to do and I...I forgive him. I only wish he were alive for me to tell him that."

Mike gathered her up in his arms once again as she started to cry. He knew she had so much pent up anger about everything that had gone on in her life. Since her birth, life had been unfair to Eleven. Mike made a promise to himself that he would do everything in his power to make sure the rest of her life was as normal and good as possible.

Author's Note: I originally had no intention of writing about how Eleven's memory got erased, but someone in the reviews mentioned it and it sparked the idea for this chapter in my head. So thank you to all of my reviewers because you really do help me shape this story! And to another reviewer who asked if I post on a schedule...sadly, I do not. I write and post when I have the time, which is not always very often. So thank you everyone who has stayed with me on this journey! Only one more chapter to go!

25. Chapter 25

Chapter 25

6 Months Later

Mike stood inside the cabin, looking out the window into the woods. In his youth, there were a few times he had stood outside that cabin, staring in, waiting for Hopper to open the door so that Mike could see Eleven. That was after Mike had found out Eleven was living with Hopper. Back then, though, he was only allowed to see her a handful of times. After all, Hopper had still been cautious about her being discovered by the wrong people. And then, of course, there was the day Mike had gone to bring Eleven the photograph from the Snowball. That was when he learned that she was really gone.

But Mike didn't want to think about that day. He wanted to focus on the happy things that had occurred since she had been back in his life. Eleven had moved into the cabin immediately after Mike had brought her there. She had changed some things around, adding her own flare in the decorations, but all in all the cabin remained relatively unchanged. Although not officially at first, Mike had basically moved in with her after only a few weeks. He had introduced Eleven to his parents, calling her Eleanor, El for short. Mike did not tell his parents that Mike had known Eleven as a child. That information would have opened up the door to too many questions. So Mike had told them that he and El had met in San Francisco, which wasn't a total lie. Although skeptical about their relationship at first, Mike's mom quickly warmed up to Eleven and soon it was as if she were a regular part of the family.

Ever since her breakthrough about her father during her first visit back to the cabin, Eleven started remembering more. It didn't take long before almost all of her memories were back from the time she lived in Hawkins. From the horrible memories of her 'papa' forcing her to do experiments in the laboratory to helping to find Will when he had been taken by the Upside Down to dancing with Mike at the Snowball. She had a near perfect memory, oftentimes remembering more details than even Mike did.

Before the summer had ended, Mike and Eleven had gone back to San Francisco to visit Hopper's grave. Mike knew that Eleven needed the closure, especially after she had made peace with her father's decision to hide her real identity from her. Mike had stood back as Eleven spoke to his grave. When she was done, Mike had his own message for Hopper. He thanked him for raising such an amazing woman and promised to take care of her. They both left the cemetery with smiles on their faces.

When the school year arrived, Mike had gone to work as head of the technology department for the Hawkins school system. He fell in love with the job immediately. Although there were times when the school technology budget, or lack thereof, seemed to get in his way, Mike enjoyed working with teachers and showing them how to use the latest technologies. He also liked seeing young minds getting on computers. He couldn't help but wonder what kind of trouble he and his friends would have gotten in if computers had been around when they were in school.

In October, Mike had been setting up a new projector and laptop for the principal of one of the two Hawkins elementary schools when Mike heard the principal talking to the secretary about a new job opening. The social worker, who serviced all of the schools like Mike did, was pregnant and would be taking the rest of the year off starting November 1st. They were in search of someone to take her position. Mike had immediately jumped into the conversation, recommending Eleven. Since her return to Hawkins, she had been working as a cashier at Melvald's General Store, the same place that Will's mom had worked for most of her life. Mike had told her that she didn't need to work. He had enough savings from working at Thompson's that they would be ok for a while, but Eleven wouldn't hear of it. She felt like she needed a job and Melvald's was as good as any. After all, it wasn't as if there were too many social worker positions in Hawkins.

On November 1st, however, Eleven became the one and only social worker for the Hawkins school district. Although she was always busy servicing so many students in so many buildings, Eleven loved her work. Mike could tell every day just how happy she was to be doing what she loved again.

Eleven and Mike had fallen into a simple, but happy routine. They didn't see each other often at work, considering there were five buildings they each serviced, but they did pretty much work the same hours. They spent most evenings together, making dinner or watching TV or visiting friends and family. Will had gone back to New York after the end of the summer, but had started making monthly trips back to Hawkins to see his friends. Dustin was so thrilled that two of his friends were working in the same school district as him that he bragged about it to even random strangers. Lucas had announced in late November that his wife was expecting their first baby, due in May. The boys had given him a hard time, jokingly questioning if he would be a good father. But they were all very happy for him and they all couldn't wait to become "uncles."

Yes, life was very good in Hawkins, Indiana. And life was about to get a whole lot better if Eleven would ever get home. Mike looked at his watch. It was thirteen minutes past six. They were supposed to be leaving at 6:30 and Eleven wasn't even home yet. As Mike thought about calling her, he saw the unmistakable gleam of a flashlight beam shining in the window. Mike raced to the front door and flung it open.

"I know, I know, I'm late," she said, her teeth chattering slightly.

"I was getting worried," Mike replied, ushering her inside. He hadn't realized how cold it had gotten. The day had been relatively warm and sunny for January in Indiana. But once the sun went down, the nights were freezing.

"I'm sorry. I should have called."

"We really need to build a driveway," Mike commented as he watched Eleven rubbing her hands together to warm them up. Since the cabin was set so deeply back in the woods, the closest you could drive up was a half mile away. Which meant he and Eleven had to walk a half mile to and from their house every time they went out. He understood why Hopper wanted to live that far away, but they weren't hiding anymore.

"Or I just need to remember my gloves," she said.

Mike looked at his watch. "6:16," he told her.

"I just have to change. I'll be right back. You look very handsome, by the way!" She shouted as she rushed off towards their bedroom. Mike smiled, smoothing his hands down his black suit jacket. He was dressed in the nicest suit he still owned. After getting hired by the Hawkins school department, Mike had donated most of the expensive suits he owned from working at Thompson's. Although he hadn't worn a suit to work every day, he always had them for special occasions. In Hawkins, however, there was rarely a need to get so dressed up so Mike donated them to a charity that provided clothes to men for job interviews. He hoped that his \$1,000 blazers would help somebody out.

But Mike had held onto just one suit. After all, even in Hawkins, every man needed something nice and he knew that night was one such occasion. Mike slipped his right hand into his pocket for the tenth time. The object he had placed in their earlier was still there, safe and sound.

"There was a family in crisis," Eleven called from the bedroom. Mike could hear the sounds of her whipping open the closet door as well as rustling through several things in the bureau.

"What?" Mike yelled back.

"That's why I was late," Eleven explained. "Did you hear about the bad car accident this morning?"

Mike did remember hearing some of the teachers talking about it as he was helping someone with a computer glitch. A car had been run off the road and had hit a tree. "Yeah. Sounded bad."

"The victim was the single father to two kids, a 5th grader and a 9th grader. He was in and out of surgery all day at the hospital. For a while they didn't know if he was going to make it. I spent all day with the kids, trying to locate a next of kin who could take the children."

"Is he alright?" Mike asked.

"He will be," Eleven answered. "But he'll need to be in the hospital for a while and then will probably be moved to a rehab facility until he gains more mobility."

"And the kids?"

"The nearest relative lives in Maine. But a family friend in Hawkins stepped forward and agreed to take the children while their father recovers. It just took a long time to put all the pieces together."

"Well, I'm glad they're all going to be alright," Mike said.

"Me too. Oh, I ran into Dustin today when I was at the high school. He was getting Emily Watt's mail from her mailbox in the office. They seem to be getting pretty serious."

"Yeah, getting somebody's office mail is one step below moving in together," Mike teased.

"Ha ha," Eleven mocked. "I like her. I think she's good for him."

"Yeah. She's changed a lot since high school. And they do seem pretty happy together."

"You know what was odd, though," Eleven said.

"What's that?"

"Dustin said 'I'll see you later' to me like he would see us tonight. He's not chaperoning too, is he?"

Even though Eleven couldn't see him from the other room, Mike nearly froze. He had to think about how he was going to respond. As he did so, he made a mental note to kill Dustin. If he ruined the surprise of what Mike had planned for the evening, he was a dead man.

"No," Mike finally answered. "I'm sure he just meant he'll see us this weekend or something. You know Dustin..."

Mike could tell by the sound of high heels clicking on the floor that Eleven was exiting the bedroom and walking towards him.

"Tell me again how the district technology instructor and the district social worker, who aren't actually teachers at the middle school, ended up chaperoning the middle school dance?"

Mike's mind went blank when she walked into the kitchen. He hadn't even registered what she said. He was too busy staring at her. She was in a black, knee-length dress. It had petite sleeves, a wide neck line that showed off just the right amount of perfect skin while still being modest, and it flared out at her waist. She had on a pair of black high heels. Somehow in the very short time she was in the bedroom she had managed to slap on a little bit of makeup and had thrown her hair up in a fancy bun that Mike couldn't even figure out how it was staying up.

"What?" She asked. "Is something wrong?"

"Yeah, something is wrong," he answered, his throat dry. Chaperoning the dance was suddenly the last thing on his mind.

"What? Did I mess up my makeup? I tried to go as fast as I could and..."

"You look way too hot to be chaperoning a middle school dance," Mike interrupted.

Eleven let out a breath and then rolled her eyes. But then she began to feel self-conscious. She looked down at herself.

"Is there something wrong with my dress? Do you think it's too... revealing? It was difficult finding something appropriate to wear to chaperone a dance. I can change if..."

Mike approached her and took her hand. "You look incredibly beautiful," he complimented. "Don't you dare change."

"Thank you," Eleven said, blushing slightly. She would never get used to Mike telling her how beautiful she was. "You look very dashing yourself."

"Dashing, huh?" He said with a laugh. "I like dashing."

"Come on, we're going to be late."

Mike put his hand into his pocket once more, making sure that the thing he needed most was still there before taking Eleven's hand and leading her out to the car.

It only took Mike and Eleven fifteen minutes to drive to the dance. As they pushed through the doors of the gym at Hawkins Middle School, they were only a few minutes late. The DJ was just finishing setting up and the only other people there was a few of the other chaperones, some of whom Mike didn't even know.

Mike looked up at the huge, sparkling, silver letters above their heads that read 'Snowball.' It was the exact same banner that had been used fifteen years earlier when he was in middle school, although perhaps a little shabbier. He looked around at the blue and white balloons and the silver streamers that had been used to decorate the gym. Very little had changed about the Snowball from what he remembered. The same decorations, the same gym, even the same fruit punch bowl and ladle on a table to the side of the gym. It was all perfect for what Mike had planned. He was brought out of his daydream as Eleven squeezed his hand.

"We better check with Principal Walters before the kids start arriving," Eleven suggested.

"Yeah," Mike said quietly, making a silent prayer that everything was going to go as planned.

Two hours late, the Snowball was in full swing. Despite the fact that the decorations were the same, the kids at the Snowball were definitely different than the kid Mike remembered being. Gone were the puffy sleeves and blue eye shadow on the girls. They were replaced with dresses that were too short and makeup that was too dark for their age. Most of the boys weren't even wearing ties. Mike remembered the too-tight tie and the itchy sweater his mom made him wear not too fondly. Although a handful of kids were awkwardly dancing practically two feet apart from each other, others were much too close for comfort. A few times as chaperones, Mike and Eleven had to break a couple apart, telling them to keep their distance. At one point they had to clean up a fruit punch spill and Mike had to stop two boys from trying to start a food fight with the bowl of chips that was next to the punch bowl. But, other than that, Eleven and

Mike stood off to the side, just watching the young teenagers in the room have fun.

At one point, however, during a particularly loud song that threatened to break their eardrums, Mike had convinced Eleven to take a photograph with him in front of the official Snowball backdrop. Just like with the other decorations, Mike was sure that the backdrop was the same as the one they had used fifteen years earlier. He couldn't wait to get the picture and put it next to the one that was up in the cabin of them as teenagers.

"Do you know any of these songs?" Eleven asked from the spot they had picked out next to the bleachers, practically shouting to be heard over the DJ.

"No. Do you?"

She shrugged. "I guess we're officially old."

Mike laughed. He glanced down at his watch. The time of his big moment was getting closer and closer. Any minute now and things would be set in motion. Just as he glanced up from his watch, a young girl approached them.

"Ms. Smith," the girl said to Eleven. "There's a girl crying in the bathroom. We can't get her to come out. Can you help?"

"I'll see what I can do," Eleven replied, taking off after the girl. Less than thirty seconds later, Mike made his way over to the doors of the gym. He poked his head out. Will, Lucas, and Dustin, who were all dressed in suits, were standing outside.

"Did you get it?" He asked.

Lucas held up a CD in a plastic case. "We had to go to three different stores, but we finally found it."

"You guys are a lifesaver. Nancy's copy was so scratched, it wouldn't play."

"Next time, try the CD before an hour before your big moment," Lucas suggested.

"Yeah, well, I plan on this being the first and last time I ever do this," Mike replied.

"You ready for this?" Will asked Mike.

"I've been waiting my whole life for this," Mike answered.

"Then go get her, tiger," Dustin told him, curling his tongue and making a purring noise that only Dustin could make.

"Would you stop!" Lucas shouted.

"Come on," Mike said.

The four boys walked back into the gym. Mike looked around, making sure the coast was clear. Eleven was still in the girl's bathroom dealing with the crying girl. Mike knew, however, that the girl was actually ok. It was just a ploy to get Eleven out of the gym. The girl was actually the sister of one of Dustin's best students who was in on the whole plan.

They all made their way over to the DJ's booth. Mike handed the man the CD and whispered in the man's ear. He gave Mike a smile and a thumb's up.

"Good luck," Will said as he, Lucas, and Dustin went to the back of the gym so they wouldn't be seen. They didn't want to mess up Mike's plan before it even began.

Mike went back to the spot he had been standing in when Eleven had headed off for the girl's bathroom. He fingered the object in his pocket and looked at his watch.

"Three, two, one..." he whispered.

"Well, crisis averted," Eleven said, walking back over to him.

"Is the girl ok?"

"She's fine. Just a little teenage drama over a boy. She perked right back up. It was the strangest thing actually. One minute she was sobbing and the next minute she was perfectly fine."

"Well, that's teenage girls for you," Mike said with a nervous laugh.

Mike looked over at the DJ who caught his eye. Mike nodded. The pop song that had been playing abruptly stopped. Some of the kids in the gym stopped dancing and groaned.

"What's going on?" Eleven asked. "Do you think he's have technical..."

Before she got the last word out, another song began to play. It didn't sound like the other songs that had been playing all night, however. It had a very distinct drum beat and guitar. Everyone in the room had stopped to listen to it, wondering if they recognized it.

*Every breath you take
Every move you make
Every bond you break
Every step you take
I'll be watching you*

Eleven eyed Mike, wondering what was going on. She of course knew the song, but couldn't understand why it was playing at a middle school dance. It certainly wasn't a popular song anymore.

"Mike, I..."

"Do you want to dance?" Mike asked.

"What is going on?"

"Do you want to dance?" He repeated.

Eleven looked into his eyes. She didn't know what was happening, but she knew that she trusted him.

"I...don't know how," she answered, knowing that was what she had said so many years ago. Her memory of that night was as fresh as if it had just happened.

"I don't either. Do you want to figure it out?"

Eleven nodded. Most of the kids had cleared off the dance floor, not knowing the song. Mike didn't care that he and Eleven were the only

ones dancing. With his hands at Eleven's waist and her hands on his shoulders, they moved slowly to the music. The kids started forming a circle around them as the music played on.

*Since you've gone I been lost without a trace
I dream at night I can only see your face
I look around but it's you I can't replace
I feel so cold and I long for your embrace
I keep crying baby, baby, please*

"Are you going to tell me what's going on?" Eleven asked him.

Mike glanced quickly over her shoulder. Lucas, Dustin, and Will had moved to the inner part of the circle so that they had a clear view of Mike and Eleven. Dustin was holding a video camera, recording them. Seeing them made Mike feel brave and he knew it was time.

"I love you," Mike said.

"I love you, too. I just don't understand what..."

"The happiest I have ever been was dancing to this song with you fifteen years ago. You have no idea how much it meant to me. How much meeting you changed me. I fell in love with you in that moment, El. In this gym to this song at this dance. That's when I knew I'd never love anyone like I loved you."

"Oh Mike..."

"But then...losing you...it was the worst thing that had ever happened to me. I didn't think I'd ever recover. I don't ever want to lose you again."

"You won't lose me."

"El, I want to spend the rest of my life with you. I want to grow old with you. I want you in my life forever. And I want this song to be playing at our wedding when I take you in my arms as my wife."

Mike could see tears in her eyes. He was fighting back his own tears.

"Mike, what are you..."

He slid his hands off her waist and grabbed the object that had been in his pocket and pulled it out. It was a small, black box. He got down on one knee and held the box up to her. He opened it, revealing a beautiful, solitaire diamond ring. Eleven gasped.

"El, will you marry me?"

Her lip trembled. "Yes. Yes! Yes, I will marry you!"

Mike leapt to his feet and they hugged. Everyone around them clapped and cheers erupted from the crowd. Mike kissed her lightly and would have kept on kissing her if they weren't standing in front of a bunch of teenagers. When they parted, he finally managed to slip the ring on her finger. Eleven stared at it, almost as if in disbelief. Dustin, Lucas, and Will approached them. Will hugged Eleven while Lucas clapped Mike on the back.

"Finally!" Lucas exclaimed. "I'm not going to be the only married man."

They all laughed.

"Congrats, man," Dustin said, hugging Mike.

They all took turns hugging and saying their congratulations. Eleven had a steady stream of tears down her cheeks. When the song ended and the commotion finally calmed down, Mike took Eleven by the hand. He led her out of the gym and into the quiet corridor. They could hear a more current pop song being played and the kids all jumping in to dance again.

"I'm so...surprised," she said, wiping tears away.

"Good surprised, I hope," Mike replied.

"Of course! Thank you for making this so amazing."

"You're the one who's amazing."

"I can't believe you...pulled it off. I mean, the Snowball and that song and..."

"Well, I had help," Mike told her. "Lucas had to actually find that song on CD and Dustin had to get that girl to fake a crises and Will helped me pick out the ring when he was here a few months ago."

"Well, it was all incredible. Thank you. Thank you for always being there for me. Thank you for loving me. Thank you for helping me be...me. I love you."

"I love you, too."

They kissed a little more passionately than they had when they were surrounded by all of the students.

"Is it true what you said?" Eleven asked, their foreheads pressed together. "That dancing with me at the Snowball was the best thing that had ever happened to you?"

Mike smiled. "Friends don't lie, remember?" She laughed. "Now, come on, let's get out of here."

"But, what about chaperoning?"

"The boys have it covered."

"Remind me to thank them next time I see them."

"Let's go home," Mike said.

Hand in hand, they walked through an arch of blue and white balloons just as they had fifteen years ago.

Author's Note: Ok...wow. It's done! Let me start off by saying that this chapter became a monster in terms of length and all of the ideas I wanted to squeeze in. I almost split it into two chapters, but in the end I knew I had to make it work as one. That is the main reason why it took me so long to write. That and I wanted it to be as "perfect" as it could be. Just like the Duffer Brothers have said in interviews that they always knew the end of season 2 would be at the Snowball, I knew that this story would end there as well.

I feel a great sense of accomplishment finally finishing this story. The story as a whole was longer than I thought it would be and took

longer to write than I thought it would, but I'm proud of what I wrote and I really hope you enjoyed it!

Thank you to all of my readers and people who took time to review. For those of you who are interested in other things I might write, I'm happy to say I do have an idea cooking for another Mileven story (although it will probably be a while before I start writing/posting) and there's a little seed of an idea floating in my head for a sequel to this story. I guess all I can say is stay tuned and thank you, thank you, thank you!